



JOHNNY LUDLOW

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"EAST LYNNE"



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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

Second Series.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,
AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

"Come, read to me some story,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

"Such words have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer."

LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

I.

A TALE OF SIN.

PART THE FIRST.

IF I don't relate this quite as usual, and it is found to be different from what I generally write, it is because I know less about it than others know. The history is Duffham's; not mine. And there are diaries in it, and all kinds of foreign things. That is, foreign to me. Duffham holds all the papers, and has lent them to me to use. It came about in this way.

"While you are picking up the sea breezes, Johnny," he said, when I called to tell him where I was going, "you can be getting on with another paper or two for us, I hope; for we like your stories."

"But I am going away for a rest, Mr. Duffham; not to work. I don't want to be ransacking memory for materials during my holiday, and then weaving them into what you call a story. Much rest that would be!"

“I’ll give you the materials for one,” he said; “plenty of them : it won’t take much weaving; you’ll have it all before your eyes. It will be nothing but play-work to you; just a bit of copying.”

“But I don’t care to put fiction on paper and send it forth as though it were true. What I tell of has mostly happened, you know.”

Duffham laughed a little. “If everything told in print were as true as this, Johnny Ludlow, the world would have witnessed some strange events. Not that you’ll find anything strange in this tale : it is quite matter-of-fact. There’s no romance about it; nothing but stern reality.”

“Well, let me see the papers.”

Duffham went out of the surgery, and came back carrying some papers tied up with pink tape, and his spectacles on.

“You’ll find a kind of narrative begun, Johnny,” he said, untying the tape, “for I tried my own hand at it. But I found I could not get on well. Writing manuscripts is not so much in my line as doctoring patients.”

“Why, here’s Lady Chavasse’s name in it!” I exclaimed, glancing over the papers. “Is it about *her*?”

“You’ll see who it’s about and who it’s not about, Johnny,” he answered, rolling them up again. “I should like you to retain the title I have put to it.”

“What is the title?”

Duffham undid the first sheet, and held it in silence for me to read. "A Tale of Sin." It took me aback. Sundry considerations naturally struck me.

"I say, Mr. Duffham, if it is about sin, and the people are still living, how will they like to see it talked of in print?"

"You leave the responsibility to me," he said; "I'll take it on my own shoulders. All you have to do is to put it into ship-shape, Johnny. That is a matter of course."

And so I took the papers. But the tale is Duffham's; not mine.

To begin with, and make it explainable, we have to go to ever so many years back: but it won't be for long.

Duffham's predecessor as general practitioner at Church Dyhely was a Mr. Layne. Some of the poor would spell it without the "y," "Lane," but the other was the proper way. This Mr. Layne was of rather good family, while his wife was but a small working farmer's daughter. Mr. Layne lived in a pretty red-brick house, opposite to Duffham's present residence. It stood a yard or two back from the path, and had woodbines and jessamine creeping up its walls; the door was in the middle, a window on each side; and there was a side-door round the little garden path, that opened into the surgery. The house was his own.

Nearly a mile beyond the village, along the straight highway, stood the gates and lodge of a fine place called Chavasse Grange, belonging to Sir Peter Chavasse. He remained an old bachelor up to nearly the end of his life. And then, when it seemed to be getting time for him to prepare for the grave, he suddenly got married. The young lady was a Miss Gertrude Cust: as might have been read in the newspapers of the day, announcing the wedding.

But, when Sir Peter brought her home, the wonder to the neighbourhood was, what could have induced the young lady to have him; for she turned out to be a mere child in years, and very beautiful. It was whispered that her family, high, poor, and haughty, had wished her to make a different match; to a broken-down old nobleman, ten times richer than Sir Peter; but that she hated the man. Sir Peter had five thousand a year, and his baronetcy was not of ancient creation. The new lady was found to be very pleasant: she went into the village often, and made acquaintance with everybody.

It was just about eight months after the marriage that Sir Peter died. The death was sudden. Mr. Layne was sent for in haste to the Grange, and found he was too late. Too late for Sir Peter: but Lady Chavasse, overcome with grief and terror, was in great need of his services.

There was a baby expected at the Grange.

Not yet: in three or four months to come. And, until this child should be born, the baronetcy had to lie in abeyance. If it proved to be a boy, he would take his father's title and fortune; if a girl, both title and fortune would lapse to some distant cousin; a young man, compared with Sir Peter; who was in the navy, and was called Parker Chavasse.

And now we must give a line or two from one of the diaries I spoke of. It is Mr. Layne's: and it appears to have been partly kept as a professional note-book, partly as a private journal. At this time Mr. Layne was a middle-aged man with three young children, girls; he had married later than some men do.

[*From an Old Note-book of Mr. Layne's.*]

May 18th.—Have had a fatiguing day. Upon getting home from my visit to Lady Chavasse, there were five different messages waiting for me. It never rains but it pours. Ten o'clock P.M., and I am dead tired; but I must write my notes before going to bed.

I wish I could get some strength and spirit into Lady Chavasse. This listlessness tells sadly against her. Over and over again it has been on the tip of my tongue to say it may go hard with her unless she uses more exertion; but I don't like to frighten her. Nearly four months now since Sir Peter died, and she has never been out but to church—and to that she

goes in the pony-carriage. "My lady, you ought to walk ; my lady, you must walk," say I. And it is just as though I spoke to the post at the lodge-gates.

I was much surprised by what she told me to-day—that there was no settlement made on her at her marriage. "Do you think my baby will be a boy, Mr. Layne?" she asked—as if it were possible for me to tell! "If it is not," she went on, "I shall have to turn out of my home here, and I have not another to go to in the wide world." And then it was, seeing my surprise, that she said there had been no settlement. "It was not my husband's intentional fault," she continued, "and I will never have him blamed, come what will. Things were unpleasant at my home, and we hurried on the marriage, he and I, so that he might take me out of it, and there was no time to get a settlement drawn up, even had we, either of us, thought of it, which we did not." Listening to this, the notion struck me that it must have been something like a runaway marriage ; but I said nothing, only bade her take heart and hope for a boy. "I cannot imagine any lot in life now so delightful as this would be—that I and my baby-boy should live on in this nice place together—I be training him always for good," she continued—and a faint pink came into her delicate cheek as she said it, a yearning look into her hazel eyes. "You'd help me

to keep him in health and make him strong, would you not, Mr. Layne?" I answered that I would do my best. Poor thing! she was only eighteen yesterday, she told me. I hope she'll be able to keep the place; I hope it won't go over her head to rough Parker Chavassee. And a rough-mannered man he is: I saw him once.

Coming home I met Thompson. The lawyer stopped, ever ready for a chat. I spoke about this expected child, and the changes its arrival might make. "It's true that Lady Chavassee would have to turn out," said he. "Every individual shilling is entailed. Books, plate, carriages—it all goes with the title. I'm not sure but Sir Peter's cast-off clothes have to be thrown in too, so strict is the entail. No settlement on her, you say, Layne? My good fellow, old Peter had nothing to settle. He had spent his income regularly, and there lay nothing beyond it. I've heard that that was one of the reasons why the Custs objected to the match." Well, it seemed a curious position: I thought so as Thompson went off; but I don't understand law, and can take his word for it. And now to bed. If——

What's that? A carriage drawing up to the house, and the night-bell! I am wanted somewhere as sure as a gun, and my night's rest is stopped, I suppose. Who'd be a doctor? Listen! There's my wife opening the street

door. What does she call out to me? Lady Chavasse not well? A carriage waiting to take me to the Grange? Thank fortune at least that I have not to walk there.

May 22nd.—Four days, and nothing noted down. But I have been very busy, what with Lady Chavasse and other patients. The doubt is over, and over well. The little boy is a boy, and a nice little fellow, too; healthy, and likely to live. He was born on the 20th. Lady Chavasse, in her gladness, says she shall get well all one way. I think she will: the mind strangely influences the body. But my lady is a little hard—what some might call unforgiving. Her mother came very many miles, posting across country, to see her and be reconciled, and Lady Chavasse refused to receive her. Mrs. Cust had to go back again as she came. I should not like to see my wife treat her mother so.

May 30th.—The child is to be named Geoffry Arthur. Sir Peter had a dislike to his own name, and had said he hoped never to call a boy of his by the same. Lady Chavasse, mindful of his every wish, has fixed on the other two. I asked her if they were the names of relatives: she laughed and said, No; she fixed on them because she thought them both nice-sounding and noble names.

The above is all that need be copied from

Mr. Layne: one has to be chary of space. Little Sir Geoffry grew and thrived: and it was a pleasure, people say, to see how happy his mother and he were, and how she devoted herself to him. He had come to her in the midst of her desolation, when she had nothing else to care for in life. It was already seen that he would be much like his father, who had been a very good-looking man in his day. Little Geoffry had Sir Peter's fair complexion and his dark-blue eyes. He was a sweet, tractable child; and Lady Chavasse thought him just an angel come out of heaven.

Time went on. When Geoffry was about seven years old—and a very pretty boy with fair curls—he went out surreptitiously on a fishing expedition, fell into the pond, and was nearly drowned. It left a severe cold upon him, which his nurse, Wilkins, said served him right. However, from that time he seemed to be less strong; and at length Lady Chavasse took him to London to show him to the doctors. The doctors told her he ought to be, for a time, in a warmer climate; and she went with him into Devonshire. But he still kept delicate. And the upshot was that Lady Chavasse let the Grange for a long term to the Goldingham family, and went away.

And so, many years passed. The Goldinghams lived on at the Grange: and Lady Chavasse nearly slipped out of remembrance.

Mr. Layne grew into ill health as he got older, and advertised for a partner. It was Duffham who answered it (a youngish man then), and they went into arrangements.

It is necessary to say something of Mr. Layne's children. There were four of them, girls. The eldest, Susan, married a Lieutenant Layne (some distant relative, who came from the West Indies), and went with him to India, where his regiment was serving, taking also her next sister, Eleanor. The third, Elizabeth, was at home ; the young one, Mary, born several years after the others, was in a school as governess-pupil, or under-teacher. It is not often that village practitioners can save money, let alone make a fortune.

The next thing was, that Mr. Layne died. His death made all the difference to his family. Mr. Duffham succeeded to the practice ; by arrangement he was to pay something yearly for five years to Mrs. Layne ; and she had a small income of her own. She would not quit the house ; it was hers now her husband was gone. Mr. Duffham took one opposite : a tall house with a bow-window to the parlour : before that, he had been in apartments. Mary Layne came home about this time, and stayed there for some weeks. She had been much over-worked in the school, and Mrs. Layne thought she required rest. She was a pleasing girl, with soft brown eyes and a nice face, and was very

good and gentle; thinking always of others, never of self. Old Duffham may choose to deny it now he's got older, but he thought her superior then to the whole world.

Matters were in this state when news spread that the Goldinghams had received notice to quit the Grange: Sir Geoffry, who would be of age the following year, was coming home to it with his mother. Accordingly, the Goldinghams departed; and the place was re-embellished and put in order for the rightful owner. He arrived in April with Lady Chavasse: and I'll copy for you what Duffham says about it. Mr. Layne had then been dead about two years.

[*From Mr. Duffham's Diary.*]

April 29th.—The new people—or I suppose I ought to say the old people—reached the Grange yesterday, and I was called in to-day to the lady's-maid—Wilkins. My lady I don't like; Sir Geoffry I do. He is a good-looking, slight young man of middle height, with a fair, refined face and honest eyes, blue as they tell me Sir Peter's used to be. An honourable, well-intentioned young fellow I am sure; affable and considerate as his mother is haughty. Poor Layne used to cry her up; he thought great things of her. I do not. It may be that power has made her selfish, and foreign travel imperious; but she's both selfish and imperious now. She is nice-looking still; and though she

wants but a year of forty, and her son is only one-and-twenty, they are almost like brother and sister. Or would be, but for Sir Geoffry's exceeding consideration for his mother ; his love and deference for her are a pattern to the young men of the present day. She has trained him to be obedient, that's certain, and to love her too : and so I suppose she has done her duty by him well. He came down the broad walk with me from the hall-door, talking of his mother : I had happened to say that the place must seem quite strange to Lady Chavasse. "Yes, it must," he answered. "She has exiled herself from it for my sake. Mr. Duffham," he continued warmly, "you cannot imagine what an admirable mother mine has been ! She resigned ease, rest, society, to devote herself to me. She gave me a home-tutor, that she might herself watch over and train me ; she went to and fro between England and foreign places with me perpetually ; even when I was at Oxford, she took a house a mile or two out that we might not be quite separated. I pray Heaven constantly that I may never cross her in thought, word, or deed : but live only to repay her love." Rather Utopian this : but I honour the young fellow for it. I've only seen him for an hour at most, and am already wishing there were more like him in the world. If his mother has faults, he does not see them ; he will never honour any other woman as he honours her. A con-

trast, this, to the contempt, ingratitude, and disrespect that some sons think it manly to show their best and truest earthly parent.

My lady is vexed, I can see, at this inopportune illness of her maid's ; for the Grange is all agog with the preparations for the grand *fête* to be held on the 20th of next month, when Sir Geoffry will come of age. Wilkins has been in the family for many years : she was originally the boy's nurse : and is quite the right hand of Lady Chavasse, so far as household management goes. Her illness just now *is* inopportune.

[*End, for the present, of Mr. Duffham's Diary.*]

Nothing was talked of, in the village or out of it, but the grand doings that were to usher in the majority of Sir Geoffry. As to Lady Chavasse, few people had seen her. Her maid's illness, as was supposed, kept her indoors ; and some of the guests were already arriving at the Grange.

One morning when it wanted about a week to the 20th, Mrs. Layne, making a pillow-case at her parlour window, in her widow's cap and spectacles, with the venetian blind open to get all the light, was startled by seeing Lady Chavasse's barouche draw up to her door, and Lady Chavasse preparing to descend from it. Mrs. Layne instinctively rose, as to a superior, and tore her glasses off : it has been said she was of a humble turn : and upon Lady Chavasse fixing

her eyes upon her in what seemed some surprise, dropped a curtsey, and thought to herself how fortunate it was she happened to have put a clean new cap on. With that, Lady Chavassee said something to the footman, who banged the carriage-door to, and ordered the coachman across the road. Mrs. Layne understood it at once : she had come to the house in mistake for Duffham's. Of course, with that grand carriage to look at opposite, and the gorgeous servants, and my lady, in a violet velvet mantle trimmed with ermine, alighting and stepping in to Duffham's, Mrs. Layne let fall her pillow-case, and did no more of it. But she was not prepared, when Lady Chavassee came out again with Mr. Duffham, to see him escort her over the road to her gate. Mrs. Layne had just time to open her parlour-door, and say to the servant, "In the other room ; show her ladyship into the other room," before she went off into complete bewilderment, and ran away with the pillow-case.

The other room was the best room. Mary Layne sat there at the old piano, practising. She had seen and heard nothing of all this ; and rose up in astonishment when the invasion took place. A beautiful lady, whom Mary did not know or recognise, was holding out a delicately-gloved hand to her, and saying that she resembled her father. It was Mary Layne's first meeting with Lady Chavassee : she had just

come home again from some heavy place of teaching, finding her strength unequal to it.

"I should have known you, I think, for a daughter of Mr. Layne's had I met you in the street," said Lady Chavasse, graciously.

Mary was blushing like anything. Lady Chavasse thought her an elegant girl, in spite of the shabby black silk she was dressed in: very pretty too. At least, it was a nice countenance; and my lady quite took to it. Mrs. Layne, having collected her wits, and taken off her apron, came in then: and Mary, who was humble-minded also, though not exactly in the same way that her mother was, modestly retired.

My lady was all graciousness: just as much so that morning as she used to be. Perhaps the sight of Mrs. Layne put her in mind of the old days when she was herself suffering trouble in a widow's cap, and not knowing how matters would turn out for her, or how they would not. She told Mrs. Layne that she had, unthinkingly, bid her servants that morning drive to *Mr. Layne's*: and it was only when she saw Mrs. Layne at the window in her widow's cap, that she remembered the mistake. She talked of her son Geoffry, praising his worth and his goodness; she bade Mrs. Layne to the *fête* on the 20th, saying she must come and bring her two daughters, and she would take no denial. And Mrs. Layne, curtseying five hundred times—which did not become her, for she was short and stout

—opened the front-door to her ladyship with her own hands, and stood there curtsying until the carriage had dashed away.

“We’ll go on the 20th,” she said to her daughters. “I didn’t like to say nay to her ladyship; and I’d be glad to see what the young heir’s like. He was as pretty a boy as you’d wish to see. There’ll no doubt be some people there of our own condition that we can mix with, and it will be in the open air: so we shan’t feel strange.”

But when the day arrived, and they had reached the Grange, it seemed that they felt very strange. Whether amidst the crowds they did not find any of their “own condition,” or that none were there, Mrs. Layne did not know. Once, they came near Lady Chavasse. Lady Chavasse surrounded by a bevy of people that Mrs. Layne took to be lords and ladies—and perhaps she was right—bowed distantly, and waved her hand, as much as to say, “Make yourselves at home, but don’t trouble me:” and Mrs. Layne curtsyed herself to a respectful distance. It was a fine bright day, very warm; and she sat on a bench in the park with her daughters, listening to the band, looking at the company, and wondering which was the heir. Some hours seemed to pass in this way, and gradually the grounds grew deserted. People were eating and drinking in a distant tent—the lords and ladies Mrs. Layne supposed, and she

did not presume to venture amongst them. Presently a young man approached, who had observed from a distance the solitary group. A fat old lady in widow's mourning; and the younger ones in pretty white bonnets and new black silks.

"Will you allow me to take you where you will get some refreshment?" he said, raising his hat, and addressing Mrs. Layne.

She paused before answering, taken aback by his looks, as she described it afterwards, for he put her in mind of Sir Peter. It was as nice a face as Sir Peter's used to be, clean-shaved, except for the light whiskers: and if those were not Sir Peter's kindly blue eyes, why her memory failed her. But the dress puzzled Mrs. Layne: he wore a dark-blue frock coat and grey trousers, a white waistcoat with a thin gold chain passed across it and a drooping seal: all very nice and gentlemanly certainly, but quite plain. What she had expected to see the heir attired in, Mrs. Layne never afterwards settled with herself: perhaps purple and miniver.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, speaking at length, "but I think you must be Sir Geoffry?"

"Yes, I am Sir Geoffry."

"Lord bless me!" cried Mrs. Layne.

She told him, curtseying, who she was, adding, as an apology for being found there, that her ladyship had invited her and her girls, and

wouldn't take a denial. Geoffry held out his arm cordially to lead her to the tent, and glanced behind at the "girls," remembering what his mother had said to him of one of them: "a sweet-looking young woman, Geoffry, poor Layne's daughter, quite elegant." Yes, she was sweet-looking and elegant also, Geoffry decided. The elder one was like her mother, short, stout, and—Geoffry could not help seeing it—common. He told Mrs. Layne that he could remember her husband still: he spoke of a ride the doctor had taken him, seated before him on his horse; and altogether in that short minute or two won, by his true affability, the heart of the doctor's widow.

The tent was crowded to confusion. Waiters were running about, and there was much clatter of knives and forks. Sir Geoffry could find but two places anywhere; at which he seated Mrs. Layne and her daughter Elizabeth, according to precedence.

"I will find you a place in the other tent, if you will come with me," he said to Mary.

She wished to refuse. She had a suspicion that the other tent was the one for the "lords and ladies," people who were altogether above her. But Sir Geoffry was holding up the canvas for her to pass out, and she was too timid to disobey. He walked by her side nearly in silence, speaking a courteous word or two only, to put her at her ease. The band

was playing "The Roast Beef of Old England."

But the other tent seemed in worse confusion as far as crowding went. Some one turned on her seat to accost Sir Geoffry: a slight, upright girl, with finely-carved features of that creamy white rarely seen, and a haughty expression in her very light eyes.

"You are being waited for, Geoffry. Don't you know that you preside?"

"No; nonsense," he answered. "There's to be nothing of that kind, Rachel; no presiding. I am going to walk about and look out for stray people. Some of the strangers will get nothing, if they are not seen after. Could you make room for one by you?"

"Who is it?" she asked.

Sir Geoffry said a word in her ear, and she moved a few inches higher up. He stepped back to Mary Layne. She had been looking at the young lady, who was so richly dressed—in some thin material of shining blue and lace—and who was so entirely at her ease as to be sitting without her bonnet, which she had put at her feet.

"We have made a place for you," said Sir Geoffry. "I fear you will be a little crowded. Miss Layne, Rachel."

Mary waited to thank him before taking it. Her cheeks were full of blushes, her soft dark eyes went out to his. She felt ashamed that he

should take so much trouble for her, and strove to say it. Sir Geoffry held her hand while he answered, his own eyes looking back again.

But Mary sat for some minutes before any one came to wait on her. The young lady whom Sir Geoffry had called Rachel was busy with her own plate, and did not observe. Presently, she looked round.

“Dear me! what are they about? Field!” she imperatively called out to the butler, who was passing. He turned at once.

“My lady?”

“Have the goodness to attend here,” said Lady Rachel, indicating the vacant space before Miss Layne. “This young lady has had nothing.”

“So I am amidst the lords and ladies,” thought Mary, as the butler presented her with a card of the dishes, made out in French, and inquired what she would be pleased to take. She was inexperienced and shy; and did not know where to look or what to say. Lady Rachel spoke to her once or twice, and was civilly distant: and so the half-hour was got over. When Sir Geoffry’s health was proposed by Lord L., the young baronet suddenly appeared in his rightful place at the table’s head. He thanked them all very heartily in a few words; and said he hoped he *should* live long, as they had all just been wishing him, live that he might repay his dear mother one tithe of the

sacrifices she had made, and the love she had lavished on him.

The cheers broke forth as he finished, his eyes wet with the sincerity of his feeling, the music burst out with a crash, "See the conquering hero comes," and Mary Layne felt every nerve thrill within her; as if she would faint with the excess of the unwonted emotion.

[*Mr. Duffham's Diary.*]

June 2nd.—The rejoicings are well over, and Sir Geoffry Chavasse is his own master. In law, at any rate; but it strikes me he will never know any will but his mother's. It's not that he possesses none of his own—rather the contrary I fancy; but in his filial love and reverence he merges it in hers. It is, on the one hand, good to see; on the other, one can but fancy his ideal of the fifth commandment is somewhat exaggerated. Lady Chavasse on her part seems bound up in him. To him there is no sign of imperiousness, no assertion of self-will: and, so far as can be seen, she does not *exact* deference. "Geoffry, would you wish this?" she says. "Geoffry, would you like the other? My darling Geoffry, don't you think it might be well to do so-and-so?" No. It is a case of true genuine filial respect and love; and one can but honour Lady Chavasse for having gained it.

My lady has condescended to be almost con-

fidential with me. The illness of her maid has been a long and serious one, and I have had to be a good deal at the Grange. "Sir Geoffry is engaged to be married, Mr. Duffham," she said to me yesterday, when our conversation had turned—as it often does turn—on Sir Geoffry. I could not help showing some surprise: and, one word leading to another, I soon grasped the whole case. Not so much by what she directly said, as by the habit I have of putting two-and-two together.

Conspicuous amidst the guests at the *fête* on the 20th of May, was Lady Rachel Derreston: a cold, self-possessed girl, with strictly classical features, and the palest blue eyes I ever saw. It would be a very handsome face—and indeed *is*—but for the cold, proud expression; she is the daughter of one of Lady Chavasse's sisters, who married the Earl of Derreston, and is now a very slender-portioned widow with some expensive daughters. It is to this Lady Rachel that Sir Geoffry is engaged. The engagement is not of his own seeking, or of hers; the two mothers settled it between them when the children were young; they have been brought up to look on each other as future husband and wife, and have done so as a matter-of-course. Neither of them, by what I can gather, has the slightest intention, or wish, to turn aside from fulfilling the contract: they will ratify it in just the same business manner and with the same

calm feelings that they would take the lease of a house. It is not their fault : they should not have been led into it. Human nature is cross and contrary as a sour crab : had the two young people been thrown together now for the first time, and been warned *not* to fall in love with each other, the chances are they'd have tumbled headlong into it before the week was out : as it is, they like each other as cousins, or brother and sister, but they'll never get beyond that. *I* can see. The two old sisters have a private understanding with each other—and my young Lady Rachel dutifully falls in with it—that after the marriage Lady Chavasse shall still live and rule at the Grange. Indeed she implied it when she let fall the words, perhaps unthinkingly—“Geoffry would never marry to put me out of my home here, Mr. Duffham.” And I am sure that he never would.

Lady Rachel is here still. I often see her and Sir Geoffry together, indoors or out ; but I have never yet seen a symptom of courtship on either side. They call each other “Geoffry” and “Rachel ;” and are as indifferently familiar as brother and sister. That they will be sufficiently happy with a quiet, moonlight kind of happiness, is nearly sure. I find that I am not at liberty to mention this engagement abroad : and that's why I say my lady has grown confidential with me.

June 29th.—Wilkins continues very ill ; and

it puts my lady about amazingly. The maid who has been taking Wilkins's duties, Hester Picker, is a country girl of the locality, Goody Picker's daughter ; her services being as different from those of the easy, experienced Wilkins, as dark is from light. "She manages my hair atrociously," cried my lady to me one day in her vexation ; "she attempted to write a note for me in answer to inquiries for the character of my late page, and the spelling was so bad it could not be sent."

Lady Rachel has left. Sir Geoffry escorted her to her home (near Bath), stayed two days there, and came back again. And glad to be back, evidently : he does not care to be long separated from his mother. The more I see of this young fellow, the more I like him. He has no bad habits ; does not smoke or swear : reads, rides, drives, loves flowers, and is ever ready to do a good turn for rich or poor. "You appear to have grown up quite strong, Sir Geoffry," I said to him to-day when we were in the greenhouse, and he leaped on a ledge to do something or other to the broken cord of the window. "Oh, quite," he answered. "I think I am stronger and heartier than most men : and I owe the thanks for it to my mother. It was not only my health of body she cared for and watched over, but of mind. She taught me to love rational pursuits, in contradistinction to those irrational ; she showed me how to

choose the good, and reject the evil : it is she alone who has made me what I am."

July 5th.—Mary Layne is going to the Grange as companion to Lady Chavasse. "Humble companion," as my lady takes care to put it. It has been brought about in this way. Wilkins is slightly improving : but it will be months before she can resume her duties about Lady Chavasse : and my lady has at length got this opinion out of me. "Five or six months !" she exclaimed in dismay. "But it is only what I have lately suspected. Mr. Duffham, I have been thinking that I must take a companion ; and now this has confirmed it. A humble companion, who will not object to do my hair on state occasions, and superintend Picker's trimming of my dresses, especially the lace ; and who will write notes for me when I desire it, and read to me when Sir Geoffry's not here ; and sit with me if I wish it. She'd not dine with us, of course ; but I might sometimes let her sit down to luncheon. In short, what I want is a well-educated lady-like young woman, who will make herself useful. Do you happen to know of one ?"

I mentioned Mary Layne. She has been wishing not to return to the heavy work and confinement of a school, where she had to sit up late, night after night, correcting exercises, and touching up drawings by gas-light. My lady caught at it at once. "Mary Layne ! the

very thing. I like the look of the girl much, Mr. Duffham ; and of course she'll not be above doing anything required of her : Layne, the apothecary's daughter, cannot be called a gentlewoman in position, you know."

She forgot I was an apothecary also ; I'll give her that credit. But this is a specimen of the way my lady's exclusive spirit peeps out.

And so it is settled. And if Miss Mary had been suddenly offered a position in the Royal household, she could not have thought more of it. "Mr. Duffham, I will try my very best to satisfy Lady Chavasse," says she to me in an ecstasy ; "I'll do anything and everything required of me : who am I that I should be above it ?" And by the glistening of her sweet brown eyes, and the rose bloom on her cheeks, it would seem that she expects she's going into fairy-land. Well, the Grange is a nice place : and she is to have thirty guineas a year. At the last school she had twenty pounds ; at the first ten.

[End of the Diary for the present.]

Miss Layne entered the Grange with trepidation. She had never been inside the house, and at first she thought it was fairy-land realised, and that she was out of place in it. A broad flight of three or four steps led up to the wide entrance-door ; the beauteous colours from the

painted windows shone on the mosaic-flagged hall; on the right were the grand drawing-rooms; on the left the dining-room and Sir Geoffry's library. Behind the library, going down a step or two, was a low, shady apartment, its glass doors opening on a small grass-plat, round which flowers were planted; and beyond it lay the fragrant herbary. This little room was called the garden-room; and on the morning of Miss Layne's arrival, after she had taken off her things, Hester Picker (who thought as much nearly of the old surgeon's daughter as she did of my lady) curtsied her into it, and said it was to be Miss Layne's sitting-room, when she was not with my lady.

Mary Layne looked around. She thought it charming. It had an old Turkey carpet, and faded red chairs, and a shabby checked cloth on the table, with other ancient furniture; but the subdued light was grateful after the garish July sun, and the sweetness came in from the herbs and flowers. Mary stood, wondering what she had to do first, and not quite daring to sit down even on one of the old red chairs. The Grange was the Grange, and my lady was my lady; and they were altogether above the sphere in which she had been brought up. She had a new lilac muslin dress on, fresh and simple; her smooth brown hair had a bit of lilac ribbon in it; and she looked as pretty and lady-like as a girl can look. Standing at the back there beyond the

table, was she, when Sir Geoffry walked in at the glass doors, his light summer coat thrown back, and a heap of small paper packets in his hands, containing seeds. At first he looked astonished: not remembering her.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, his face lighting up, as he took off his straw hat. "Miss Mary Layne, I think. I did not know you at the minute. My mother said she expected you to-day."

He came round to her with outstretched hand, and then put a chair for her, just as though she had been a duchess—or Lady Rachel Derreston. Mary did not take the chair: she felt strange in her new home, and as yet very timid.

"I am not sure what Lady Chavassee would wish me to do," she ventured to say, believing it might be looked upon as next door to a crime to be seen idle, in a place where she was to receive thirty guineas a year. "There appears to be no work here."

"Get a book and read!" cried Sir Geoffry. "I'll find you one as soon as I have put up these seeds. A box of new novels has just come from town. I hope you will make yourself at home with us, and be happy," he added in his kindness.

"Thank you, sir; I am sure I shall."

He was putting up the seeds, when Lady Chavassee entered. She had a way of taking

likes and dislikes, and she never scrupled to show either. On this first day, it seemed that she did not know how to make enough of Mary. She chose to forget that she was only to be the humble companion, and treated her as a guest. She carried her in to take luncheon with herself and Sir Geoffry ; she made her play and sing ; she showed her the drawing-rooms and the flower-gardens, and finally took her out in the barouche. She certainly did not ask her in to dinner, but said she should expect her to come to the drawing-room afterwards, and spend the evening. And Miss Layne, not ignorant of the customs obtaining in great houses, dressed herself for it in her one evening dress of white spotted muslin, and changed the lilac ribbon in her hair for blue.

So that, you perceive, the girl was inaugurated at the Grange as a young lady, almost as an equal, and not as a servant—as Lady Chavassee's true opinion would have classed her. That was mistake the first. For it led Sir Geoffry to make a companion of Miss Layne ; that is, to treat her as though she belonged to their order ; which otherwise he certainly would not have done. Had Miss Layne been assigned her true place at first—the place that Lady Chavassee meant her to fill, that of an inferior and humble dependent—Sir Geoffry, out of simple respect to the girl and to his mother, would have kept his distance.

As the time passed on they grew great friends. Lady Chavassee retained her liking for Mary, and saw no harm in the growing intimacy with Sir Geoffry. That was mistake the second. Both of them were drifting into love ; but Lady Chavassee dreamt it not. The social gulf that spread itself between Sir Geoffry Chavassee, of Chavassee Grange, and Mary Layne, daughter of the late hard-worked village apothecary, was one that Lady Chavassee would have said (had she been asked to think about it) could never be bridged over : and for this very reason she saw no danger in the intercourse. She regarded Mary Layne as of a totally different caste from themselves, and never supposed but Sir Geoffry did too.

And so time went on, on the wings of love. There were garden walks together and moonlight saunterings ; meetings in my lady's presence, meetings without it. Sir Geoffry, going in and out of the garden-parlour at will, as he had been accustomed to do—for it was where all kinds of things belonging to him were kept : choice seeds, his fishing-rods, his collection of butterflies—would linger there by the hour together, talking to Mary at her work. And, before either of them was conscious of the danger, they had each passed into a dream that changed everything about them to Paradise.

Of course Sir Geoffry, when he awoke to the truth—that it was love—ought to have gone

away. Or have contrived to get his mother to dismiss Miss Layne. He did nothing of the sort. And, for this, some people—Duffham for one—held him even more to blame than for anything that happened afterwards. But how could he voluntarily blight his new happiness, and hers? It was so intense as to absorb every other feeling? it took his common sense away from him. And thus they went dreaming on together in that one spring-time (of the heart, not of the weather), and never thought about sliding into shoals and pitfalls.

In the autumn my lady went to the seaside in Cornwall, taking Mary *as her maid*, and escorted by her son. “Will you do for me what I want while I am away? I do not care to be troubled with Picker,” she had said; and Mary replied, as in duty bound, that she would. It is inconvenient to treat a maid as a lady, especially in a strange place, and Mary found that during this sojourn Lady Chavasse did not attempt it. To all intents and purposes Mary was the maid now; she did not sit with her lady, she took her meals apart; she was, in fact, regarded as the lady’s-maid by all, and nothing else. Lady Chavasse even took to call her “Layne.” This, the sudden dethroning her of her social status, was the third mistake; and this one, as the first, was my lady’s. Sir Geoffry had been led to regard her as a companion; now he saw her but as a servant. But, servant

or no servant, you cannot put love out of the heart, once it has possession of it.

At the month's end they returned home : and there Mary found that she was to retain this low station ; never again would she be exalted as she had been. Lady Chavasse had tired of the new toy, and just carelessly allowed her to find her own level. Except that Miss Layne sat in the garden parlour, and her meals were served there, she was not much distinguished from Hester Picker and the other servants ; indeed, Picker sometimes sat in the parlour too, when they had lace, or what not, to mend for my lady. Geoffry in his heart was grieved at the changed treatment of Miss Layne ; he thought it wrong and unjust ; and to make up for the mistake, was with her a great deal himself.

Things were in this position when Lady Chavasse was summoned to Bath : her sister, Lady Derreston, was taken ill. Sir Geoffry escorted her thither. Picker was taken, not Miss Layne. In the countess's small household, Mary, in her anomalous position—for she could not be altogether put with the servants—would have been an inconvenience : and my lady bade her make herself happy at the Grange, and left her a lot of fine needlework to get through.

Leaving his mother in Bath, Sir Geoffry went to London, stayed a week or so, and then came to the Grange. Another week or two, and he

returned to Bath to bring his mother home. And so the winter set in, and wore on. And now all that has to be told to the paper's end is taken from diaries, Duffham's and others. But for convenience' sake, I put it as though the words were my own, instead of copying literally.

Spring came in early. February was not quite at an end, and the trees were beginning to show their green. All the month it had been warm weather ; but people said it was too relaxing for the season, and they and the trees should suffer for it later. A good bit of sickness was going about ; and, amidst others who had to give in for a time, was Duffham himself. He got inflammation of the lungs. His brother Luke, who was partner in a medical firm elsewhere, came to Church Dykely for a week or two, to take the patients. Luke was a plain-speaking man of forty, with rough hair, and a good heart.

The afternoon after he arrived, an applicant came into the surgery with her daughter. It was Mrs. Layne, but the temporary doctor did not know her. Mrs. Layne never did look like a lady, and he did not take her for one : he thought it some respectable country woman : she had flung a very ancient cloak over her worn morning gown. She expressed herself dis-

appointed at not seeing Mr. Duffham, but opened the consultation with the brother instead. Mrs. Layne took it for granted she was known, and talked accordingly.

Her daughter, whom she kept calling Mary, and nothing else, had been ailing lately ; she, Mrs. Layne, could not think what was the matter with her, unless it was the unusually warm spring. She got thinner and weaker daily ; her cheeks were pale, her eyes seemed to have no life in them : she was very low in spirits ; yet, in spite of all this, Mary had kept on saying it was "nothing." My Lady Chavasse—returning home from London yesterday, whither she had accompanied her son a week or two ago, and whom she had left there—was so much struck with the change she saw in Mary, who lived with her as humble companion, Mrs. Layne added, in a parenthesis, that she insisted on her seeing Mr. Duffham, that he might prescribe some tonics. And accordingly Mary had walked to her mother's this afternoon.

Mr. Luke Duffham listened to all this with one ear, as it were. He supposed it might be the warm spring, as suggested. However, he took Mary into the patients' room, and examined her : felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, sounded her chest, with all the rest of it that doctors treat their clients to ; and asked her this, that, and the other—about five-and-twenty questions, when perhaps five might have done. The up-

shot of it all was, that Mary Layne went off in a dead faint.

"What on earth can be the matter with her?" cried the alarmed mother, when they had brought her round.

Mr. Luke Duffham, going back to the surgery with Mrs. Layne, shut the doors, and told her what he thought it was. It so startled the old lady that she backed against the counter and upset the scales.

"How dare you say so, sir!"

"But I am sure of it," returned Mr. Luke.

"Lord be good to me!" gasped Mrs. Layne, looking like one terrified out of her seven senses. "The worst I feared was that it might be consumption. A sister of mine died in it."

"Where shall I send the medicine to?" inquired the doctor.

"Anywhere. Over the way, if you like," continued Mrs. Layne, in her perturbation.

"Certainly. Where to, over the way?"

"To my house. Don't you know me? I am the widow of your brother's late partner. This unhappy child is the one he was fondest of; she is only nineteen, much younger than the rest."

"Mrs. Layne!" thought Luke Duffham, in surprise, "I wish I had known; I might have hesitated before speaking plainly. But where would have been the good?"

The first thing Mrs. Layne did, was to shut

her own door against Mary, and send her back to the Grange in a shower of anger. She was an honest old lady, of most irreproachable character; never needing, as she phrased it, to have had a blush on her cheek, for herself or anybody belonging to her. In her indignation, she could have crushed Mary to the earth. Whatever it might be that the poor girl had done, robbed a church, or shot its parson, her mother deemed that she deserved hanging.

Mary Layne walked back to the Grange: where else had she to go? Broken-hearted, humiliated, weak almost unto death, she was like a reed in her mother's hands, yielding herself to any command given; and only wishing she might die. Lady Chavasse, compassionating her evident suffering, brought her a glass of wine with her own hand, and inquired what Mr. Duffham said, and whether he was going to give her tonics. Instead of answering, Mary went into another faint: and my lady thought she had over-walked herself. "I wish I had sent her in the carriage," said she, kindly. And while the wish was yet upon her lips, Mrs. Layne arrived at the Grange, to request an audience of her ladyship.

Then was commotion. My lady talked and stormed, Mrs. Layne talked and cried. Both were united in one thing—the heaping of reproaches on Mary. They were in the grand drawing-room—where my lady had been sitting

when Mrs. Layne was shown in. Lady Chavasse sat back, furious and scornful, in her pink velvet chair ; Mrs. Layne stood ; Mary had sunk on the carpet kneeling, her face bent, her clasped hands raised as if imploring mercy. This group was suddenly broken in upon by Sir Geoffry—who had but then reached the Grange from town. They were too noisy to notice him. Halting in dismay, he had the pleasure of catching a sentence or two addressed to the unhappy Mary.

“The best thing you can do is to find refuge in the workhouse,” stormed Lady Chavasse. “Out of my house you turn this hour.”

“The best thing you can do is to go on the tramp, where you won’t be known,” amended Mrs. Layne, who was nearly beside herself with conflicting emotions. “Never again shall you enter the home that was your poor dead father’s. You wicked girl!—and you hardly twenty years old yet! But, my lady, I can but think—though I know we are humble people, as compared with you, and perhaps I’ve no right to say it—that Sir Geoffry has not behaved like a gentleman.”

“Hold your tongue, woman,” said her Ladyship. “Sir Geoffry——”

“Sir Geoffry is at least enough of a gentleman to take his evil deeds on himself, and not shift them on others,” spoke the baronet, stepping forward—and the unexpected interruption

was startling to them all. My lady pointed imperatively to the door, but he stood his ground.

It was no doubt a bitter moment for him ; bringing home to him an awful amount of self-humiliation : for throughout his life he had striven to do right instead of wrong. And when these better men yield to temptation instead of fleeing from it, the re-acting sting is of the sharpest. The wisest and strongest sometimes fall : and find too late that, though the fall was so easy, the picking-up is of all things most difficult. Sir Geoffry's face was white as death.

"Get up, Mary," he said gently, taking her hand to help her in all respect. "Mrs. Layne," he added, turning to face the others ; "my dear mother—if I may dare still to call you so—suffer me to say a word. For all that has taken place, I am alone to blame ; on me only must it rest. The fault——"

"Sin, sir," interrupted Mrs. Layne.

"Yes. Thank you. Sin. The sin lies with me, not with Mary. In my presence reproach shall not be visited on her. She has enough trouble to bear without that. I wish to heaven that I had never—Mrs. Layne, believe me," he resumed, after the breaking pause, "no one can feel this more keenly than I. And, if circumstances permit me to make reparation, I will make it !"

Sir Geoffry wanted (circumstances permitting,

as he shortly put it) to marry Mary Layne ; he *wished* to do it. Taking his mother into another room, he told her this. Lady Chavassee simply thought him mad. She grew a little afraid of him, lest he should set her and all high rules of propriety at nought, and do it.

But trouble like this cannot be settled in an hour. Lady Chavassee, in her great fear, conciliated just a little : she did not turn Miss Layne out at once, as threatened, but suffered her to remain at the Grange for the night.

“ In any case, whatever may be the ending of this, it is not from my family that risk of exposure must come,” spoke Sir Geoffry, in a tone of firmness. “ It might leave me no alternative.”

“ No alternative ?” repeated Lady Chavassee. “ How ?”

“ Between my duty to you, and my duty to her,” said Sir Geoffry. And my lady’s heart fainted within her at the suggested fear.

THEY were together in the library at Chavassee Grange, Lady Chavassee and her only son, Geoffry. It was early morning ; they had sat in the breakfast-room making a show of partaking of the morning meal, each of them with that bitter trouble at the heart that had been known only—to my lady, at least—since the previous day. But the farce of speak-

ing in monosyllables to one another could not be kept up—the trouble had to be dealt with, and without delay ; and when the poor meal could no longer be prolonged by any artifice, Sir Geoffry held open the door for his mother to pass through, and crossed the hall with her to the library. Shut within its thick walls they could discuss the secret in safety ; no eye to see them, no ear to hear.

Sir Geoffry mechanically stirred the fire, and placed a chair for his mother near it. The weather appeared to be changing. Instead of the unseasonable relaxing warmth that had been upon the earth up to the previous day, a cold north-east wind had set in, enough to freeze people's marrow. The skies were grey and lowering ; the trees shook and moaned : winter was taking up his place again.

So much the better. Blue skies and brightness would hardly have accorded with Sir Geoffry's spirit. He might have to endure many cruel visitations ere he died, but never a one so cruel as this. No evil that heaven can send upon us, or man inflict, is so hard to bear as self-reproach.

If ever a son had idolised a mother, it had surely been Geoffry Chavasse. They had been knit together in the strongest bonds of filial love. His whole thought from his boyhood had been her comfort : to have sacrificed himself for her, if needs must, would have been

a cheerful task. When he came of age, not yet so very many months ago, he had resolved that his whole future life should be devoted to promote her happiness—as her life had been devoted to him in the days of his sickly boyhood. Her wishes were his; her word his law; he would have died rather than cause her a moment's pain.

And how had he, even thus early, fulfilled this? Look at him, as he leans against the heavy frame-work of the window, drawn back from it that the light may not fall on his subdued face. The brow is bent in grievous doubt; the dark-blue eyes, generally so honestly clear, are hot with trouble; the bright hair hangs limp. Yes; he would have died rather than bring his mother pain: that was his true creed and belief; but, like many another whose resolves are made in all good faith, he had signally failed, even while he was thinking it, and brought pain to her in a crushing heap. He hated himself as he looked at her pale countenance; at the traces of tears in her heavy eyes. Never a minute's sleep had she had the previous night, it was plain to be seen; and, as for him, he had paced his chamber until morning, not attempting to go to rest. But there was a task close before him, heavier than any that had gone before; heavier even than this silent repentance—the deciding *what* was to be done in the calamity; and Sir Geoffry knew

that his duty to his mother and his duty to another would clash. All the past night he had been earnestly trying to decide which of the two might be evaded with the least sin—and he thought he saw which.

Lady Chavasse had taken the chair he placed for her; sitting upright in it, and waiting for him to speak. She knew, as well as he, that this next hour would decide their fate in life: whether they should still be together, a loving mother and son; or whether they should become estranged, and separate for ever. He crossed to the fire-place and put his elbow on the mantel-piece, shielding his eyes with his hand. Just a few words, he said, of his sense of shame and sorrow; of regret that he should have brought this dishonour on himself and his mother's home; of hope that he might be permitted, by heaven and circumstances, to work out his repentance, in endeavouring daily, hourly, constantly, to atone to her for it—to her, his greatly-loved mother. And then—lifting his face from the hand that had partially hidden it—he asked her to be patient, and to hear him without interruption a little further. And Lady Chavasse bowed her head in acquiescence.

“Nothing remains for me but to marry Miss Layne,” he began: and my lady, as she heard the expected avowal, bit her compressed lips. “It is the only course open to me; unless I would

forfeit every claim to honour, and to the respect of upright men. If you will give your consent to this, the evil may be in a degree repaired; nothing need ever be known; Mary's good name may be saved—mine, too, if it comes to that—and eventually we may be all happy together——”

“Do not try me too much, Geoffry,” came the low interruption.

“Mother, you signified that you would hear me to the end. I will not try you more than I can help; but it is necessary that I should speak fully. All last night I was walking about my room in self-commune; deliberating what way was open, if any, that it would be practicable to take—and I saw but this one. Let me marry her. It will be easy of accomplishment—speaking in reference to appearances and the world. She might go for a week or two to her mother's; for a month or two, if it were thought better and less suspicious; there is no pressing hurry. We could then be married quietly, and go abroad for a year or so, or for longer; and come back together to the Grange, and be your dutiful and loving children always, just as it was intended I and Rachel should be. But that you have liked Mary Layne very much, I might have felt more difficulty in proposing this.”

“I have liked her as my servant,” said Lady Chavassee, scornfully.

“Pardon me, you have liked her as a lady.

Do you remember once saying—it was when she first came—that if you had had a daughter you could have wished her to be just like Mary Layne. Before I ever saw her, you told me she was a sweet, elegant young woman ; and—mother—she is nothing less. Oh, mother, mother !” continued Sir Geoffry, with emotion, “if you will but forget your prejudices for my sake, and consent to what I ask, we would endeavour to be ever repaying you in love and services during our after-life. I know what a great sacrifice it will be ; but for my sake I venture to crave it of you—for my sake.”

A great fear lay upon Lady Chavasse : it had lain on her ever since the previous day—that he might carry this marriage out of his own will. So that she dared not answer too imperatively. She was bitterly hurt, and caught up her breath with a sob.

“Do you want to kill me, Geoffry ?”

“Heaven knows that I wish I had been killed, before I brought this distress upon you,” was his rejoinder.

“I *am* distressed. I have never felt anything like it since your father died. No ; not once when you, a child of seven, were given over in illness, and it was thought you would not live till morning.”

Sir Geoffry passed his hand hastily across his eyes, in which stood the hot tears. His heart was sore, nearly unto breaking ; his ingratitude

to his mother seemed fearfully great. He longed to throw himself at her feet, and clasp her knees, and tell how deep for her was his love, how true and deep it always would be.

“Though the whole world had united to deceive me, Geoffry, I could never have believed that you would. Why did you pretend to be fond of Rachel?”

“I never pretended to be fonder of Rachel than I was. I liked her as a cousin, nothing more. I know it now. And—mother”—he added, with a flush upon his face, and a dropping of the voice, “it is better and safer that the knowledge should have come to me before our marriage than after it.”

“Nonsense,” said Lady Chavasse. “Once married, a man of right principles is always safe in them.”

Sir Geoffry was silent. Not very long ago, he had thought himself safe in his. With every word, it seemed that his shame and his sin came more glaringly home to him.

“Then you mean to tell me that you do not like Rachel——”

“That I have no love for her. If—if there be any one plea that I can put forth as a faint shadow of excuse for what has happened, it lies in my love for another. Faint it is, heaven knows : the excuse, not the love. *That* is deep enough : but I would rather not speak of it to you—my mother.”

“And that you never will love Rachel?” continued Lady Chavasse, as though he had not interposed.

“Never. It is impossible that I can ever love anyone but Mary Layne. I am grateful, as things have turned out, that I did not deceive Rachel by feigning what I could not feel. Neither does she love me. We were told to consider ourselves betrothed, and did so accordingly; but, so far as love goes, it has not been so much as mentioned between us.”

“What else have you to say?” asked Lady Chavasse.

“I might say a great deal, but it would all come round to the same point: to the one petition that I am beseeching you to grant—that you will sanction the marriage.”

Lady Chavasse’s hands trembled visibly within their rich lace frills, as they lay passive on her soft dress of fine geranium cashmere. Her lips grew white with agitation.

“Geoffry!”

“My darling mother.”

“I have heard you. Will you hear me?”

“You know I will.”

“More than one-and-twenty years ago, my husband died within these walls; and I—I was not eighteen, Geoffry—felt utterly desolate. But, as the weeks went on, I said my child will be born, if God permit, and he will bring me comfort. You were born, Geoffry; you did

bring me comfort : such comfort that I thought heaven had come again. You best know, my son, what our life has been ; how we have loved each other ; how pleasantly time has flown in uninterrupted happiness. I have devoted myself, my time, my energies, everything I possessed to you, my best treasure ; I have given up the world for you, Geoffry ; I had only you left in it. Is it fit that you should fling me from you now ; that you should blight my remaining days with misery ; that you should ignore me just as though I were already dead—and all for the sake of a stranger ?”

“ But——”

“ I have not finished, Geoffry. For the sake of a stranger, whom a few months ago neither you nor I had ever seen ? If you think this—if you deem that you would be acting rightly, and can find in your heart to treat me so, why you must do it.”

“ But what I wish and propose is quite different !” he exclaimed in agony. “ Oh mother, surely you can understand me—and the dilemma I am placed in ?”

“ I understand all perfectly.”

“ Ah yes !”

“ Geoffry, there is no middle course. You must choose between me and—*her*. Once she and I separate—it will be to-day—we can never meet again. I will not tolerate her memory ; I will never submit to the degrada-

tion of hearing her named in my presence. Our paths lie asunder, Geoffry, far as the two poles: hers lies one way, mine another. You must decide for yourself which of them you will follow. If it be mine, you shall be, as ever, my dear and honoured son, and I will never, never reproach you with your folly; never revert to it; never think of it. If it be hers, why then—I will go away somewhere and hide myself, and leave the Grange free for you. And I—I dare say—shall not live long to be a thorn in your remembrance.”

She broke down with a flood of bitter sobs. Geoffry Chavasse had never seen his mother shed such. The hour was as trying to her as to him. She had loved him with a strangely selfish love, as it is in the nature of mothers to do; and that she should have to bid him choose between her and another—and one so entirely beneath her as Lady Chavasse considered Mary Layne to be—was gall and wormwood. Never had she stooped to put the choice before him, even in words, but for her dread that he might be intending to take it.

“It is a fitting end, Geoffry—that this worthless girl should supplant me in your home and heart,” she was resuming when her emotion allowed; but Geoffry stood forward to face her, his agitation great as her own.

“An instant, mother: that you may fully understand me. The duty I owe you, the

allegiance and the love, are paramount to all else on earth. In communing with myself last night, as I tell you I was, my heart and my reason alike showed me this. If I must choose between you and Mary Layne, there cannot be a question in my mind on which side duty lies. In all honour I am bound to make her my wife, and I should do it in all affection: but not in defiance of you; not to thrust rudely aside the love and obligations of the past one-and-twenty years. *You* must choose for me. If you refuse your approval, I have no resource but to yield to your decision; if you consent, I shall thank you and bless you for ever."

A spasm of pain passed across the mouth of Lady Chavasse. She could not help saying something that arose prominently in her mind, though it interrupted the question.

"And you can deem the apothecary Layne's daughter fit to mate with Sir Geoffry Chavasse?"

"No, I do not. Under ordinary circumstances, I should never have thought of such a thing. This unhappy business has a sting for me, mother, on many sides. Will you give me your decision?" he added, after a pause.

"I have already given it, Geoffry—so far as I am concerned. You must choose between your mother, between all the hopes and the home-interests of one-and-twenty years, and this alien stranger."

“Then I have no alternative.”

She turned her gaze steadily upon him. A sob rose in his throat as he took her hands, his voice was hoarse with emotion.

“To part from her will be like parting with life, mother. I can never know happiness again in this world.”

But the decision was irrevocable. What further passed between Sir Geoffry and his mother in the remaining half-hour they spent together: how much of entreaty and anguish was spoken on his side, how much of passionate plaint and sorrow on hers, will never be known. But she was obdurate to the last letter: and Sir Geoffry's lot in life was fixed. Mary Layne was to be sacrificed: and, in one sense of the word, himself also: and there might be no appeal.

Lady Chavasse exacted from him that he should quit the Grange at once without seeing Miss Layne, and not return to it until Mary had left it for ever. Anything he wished to say to her, he was to write. On Lady Chavasse's part, she voluntarily undertook to explain to Miss Layne their conversation faithfully, and its result; and to shield the young lady's good name from the censure of the world. She would keep her for some time longer at the Grange, be tender with her, honour her, drive out with her in the carriage so that they might be seen together, mollify her mother's anger, strive to persuade Mr. Luke Duffham that his

opinion had been mistaken, and, in any case, bind him down to secrecy : in short, she would make future matters as easy as might be for Mary, as tenaciously as though she were her own daughter. That she promised this at the sacrifice of pride and of much feeling, was indisputable ; but she meant to keep her word.

However miserable a night the others had passed, it will readily be imagined that Mary Layne had spent a worse. She made no pretence of eating breakfast : and when it was taken away sat at her work in the garden parlour, trying to do it ; but her cold fingers dropped the needle every minute, her aching brow felt as though it were bursting. Good-hearted Hester Picker was sorry to see her look so ill, and wished the nasty trying spring, hot one day, cold the next, would just settle itself down.

Mary rose from her chair, and went upstairs to her own bedroom for a brief respite : in her state of mind it seemed impossible to stay long quiescent anywhere. This little incidental occurrence frustrated one part of the understanding between Sir Geoffry and his mother—that he should quit the house without seeing Miss Layne. In descending, she chanced to cross the end of the corridor just as he came out of his mother's room after bidding her farewell. The carriage waited at the door, his coat was on his arm. Mary would have shrunk back again, but he bade her wait.

"You must allow me to shake her hand, and say just a word of adieu, mother; I am not quite a brute," he whispered. And Lady Chavassee came out of her room, and tacitly sanctioned it.

But there was literally nothing more than a hand-shake. Miss Layne, standing still in all humility, turned a little white, for she guessed that he was being sent from his home through her. Sir Geoffry held her hand for a moment.

"I am going away, Mary. My mother will explain to you. I have done my best, and failed. Before Heaven, I have striven to the uttermost, for your sake and for mine, to make reparation; but it is not to be. I leave you to my mother; she is your friend; and you shall hear from me in a day or two. I am now going to see Mrs. Layne. Good-bye: God bless you always!"

But, ere Sir Geoffry reached the hall, Lady Chavassee had run swiftly down, caught him, and was drawing him into a room. The fear had returned to her face.

"I heard you say you were going to call on the Widow Layne. Geoffry, this must not be."

"*Not be!*" he repeated in surprise. "Mother, I am obeying you in all essential things; but you cannot wish to reduce me to an utter craven. I owe an explanation to Mrs. Layne almost in the same degree that I owe it to you; and I shall certainly not quit Church Dykely until I have given it."

“Oh well—if it must be,” she conceded, afraid still. “You—you will not be drawn in to act against me, Geoffry?”

“No power on earth could draw me to that. You have my first and best allegiance; to which I bow before every other consideration, before every interest, whether of my own or of others. But for that, should I be acting as I am now? Fare you well, mother.”

She heard the carriage-door closed; she heard Sir Geoffry’s order to the footman. Even for that order, he was cautious to give a plausible excuse.

“Stop at Mrs. Layne’s. I have to leave a message from her ladyship.”

The wheels of the carriage crunched the gravel, bearing off Sir Geoffry in the storm of sleet—which had begun to fall—and Lady Chavasse passed up the stairs again. Taking the hand of Mary—who had stood above like a statue, never moving—she led her, gently enough, into her dressing-room, and put her in a comfortable chair by the fire; and prepared for this second interview.

Briefly, Lady Chavasse recounted what she had to say. Sir Geoffry had found himself obliged to choose between Miss Layne and her, his mother. Mary Layne sat with her hands before her face, and acknowledged that, if it came to such a choice, he had chosen rightly. And then, in forcible language, because it came

from her heart, my lady drew a picture of the life-long happiness she and her son had enjoyed together, of her devotion and sacrifices for him, of his deep love and reverence for her : and she quietly asked Mary to put herself in imagination in her place, and say what her feelings would have been had a stranger come in to mar this. Had she any right to do this?—Lady Chavassee asked her—would she be justified in destroying the ties of a life, in thrusting herself between mother and son?—in invoking a curse, his mother's curse, on him? My lady did not spare her : but she spoke in no angry tone, rather in a piteous and imploring one : and Mary, feeling as if matters were being put to her own better feeling, sobbed, and shook, and shrunk within herself, and could have knelt at Lady Chavassee's feet for pardon in her distress and humiliation.

And that was the end of the wretched business—as Duffham phrases it in his diary—so far as the Grange and its people were concerned. Mary Layne stayed, perforce, two or three weeks longer at the house, and my lady made much of her : she took her out daily in her carriage ; she said to her friends, in the hearing of her servants and the sympathising Hester Picker, how vexatious it was that the relaxing, unseasonable weather had brought out the delicacy that was latent in Miss Layne's constitution, and that she feared she must let her go away

somewhere for a change. Mary submitted to all. She was in that self-abased frame of mind that had my lady desired her to immolate herself on a blazing pyre, she would have gone to it meekly. My lady had interviews with Mrs. Layne, and with Duffham (who had got well then), and with his brother Luke. At the two or three weeks' end, Miss Elizabeth Layne came by appointment to the Grange, and she and Mary were driven to the nearest station in my lady's own carriage on their way to the seaside : or to elsewhere, as it might be. And never an ill breath, in the Grange or out of it, transpired to tarnish the fair fame of Mary Layne.

But my lady was not honest in one respect. The letter that arrived for Mary from Sir Geoffry a day or two after his departure, was never given to her. My lady knew she might trust her son implicitly ; he could but be straightforward and keep his word in all things ; nevertheless, she deemed the fire the safest place for the thick epistle of many sheets. On the other hand, Mary wrote to Sir Geoffry, saying that the alternative he had chosen was the only one possible to him. Nothing, no prayers of his, she said, would have induced her to put herself between him and his mother, even had he so far forgotten his duty as to urge it. It was a good and sensible letter, and none but a good and unselfish girl could have written it.

So that ended the dream and the romance.

And I hope the reader does not forget that it is Duffham's diary that's telling all this, and not I. For though dreams and romance seem to be in Duffham's line, they are not in mine.

PART THE SECOND.

NOT very long after the time that Mary Layne quitted Chavasse Grange—having closed all connection with it, never to be to it henceforth but as an utter stranger—her eldest sister, Susan, the wife of Captain Richard Layne, arrived in England from India with her children, four little ones; the eldest seven years old, the youngest eighteen months. The children had been ailing, and she brought them over for a twelvemonth's change. Mrs. Layne was a good deal worn herself, for the only nurse she had with her, a coloured woman, was sea-sick during the voyage. Her sister Eleanor, who originally went out with her to Calcutta, had made an excellent match; having married Allan McAlpin, the younger partner in the staid old firm of McAlpin Brothers, merchants of high standing, and wealthy men.

The first thing Mrs. Richard Layne did on arrival, was to establish herself in lodgings in Liverpool, the port she landed at (so as to rest a week or two from the fatigues of the voyage), and

send for her mother and sister Elizabeth. In answer came a letter from her mother, saying she was not equal to the journey and that Elizabeth was from home. It contained Elizabeth's present address, and also one or two items of news that startled young Mrs. Layne well-nigh out of her senses. Leaving her children to their nurse's care, she started for the address given, and found her two sisters, Elizabeth and Mary. The one living in a chronic state of outpouring sarcasm and reproach; the other meekly taking all as not a tithe of her just due.

After a day or two given to natural grief and lamentation, Mrs. Richard Layne took matters into her own capable hands. She considered that a more complete change would be good for Mary, and decided to convey her to the Continent. She wrote a long and confidential letter to her husband in India, of what she meant to do: and then she went back to Liverpool with Elizabeth, to leave the latter in charge of her own children and their coloured nurse, during her absence across the channel. Mrs. Layne then returned to Mary, and they started together for France.

Shortly after this, old Mrs. Layne fell ill: and Elizabeth, when she found she must go home in consequence, left a responsible English nurse with the coloured woman and children. Not for several months afterwards did Mrs. Richard Layne and Mary return from abroad; and at the end of the twelvemonth they all went back

to India—Mrs. Layne, her children, the native nurse, and Mary. Mary accompanied them in the capacity of governess.

After that, a couple of years went on.

[*From Miss Mary Layne's Journal, written in Calcutta, at the house of Captain Layne.*]

JUNE 10th.—Cool of the evening. Susan came to the schoolroom in the midst of the geography lesson this morning, and told me an old friend of mine at home had called and I was to come into the verandah to see her. I never was more surprised. It was Jane Arkill ; my chief friend in our old school-days. She has married a Mr. Cale, a doctor, who has come out here to practise. Mrs. Cale says she shall never get reconciled to the heat of India. While she sat telling us home news, she alternately wiped her pale face and stared at me, because I am so much altered. She thinks she should not have known me. It is not that my features have changed, she says, but that I have grown so much graver, and look so old. When people talk like this, I long to tell them that things have changed me ; that I have passed through a fiery trial of sin and suffering ; that my life is one long crucifixion of inward, silent repentance. When I first came out, two years ago, and people would say, "It must be the climate that is making Miss Layne look so ill," it seemed to me like the

worst hypocrisy to let them think it was the climate, and not to tell the truth. This feeling came back again to-day, when Jane Arkill—I shall often forget to call her “Cale”—said my eyes had grown to have a sad look in them; and Susan answered that young ladies faded quickly in India; and that Mary *would* apply herself too closely to the children’s studies in spite of remonstrance. Too closely! Why, if I devoted every hour of my life, night and day, to these dear children, I could never repay what their mother—or their father, either—has done for me.

My mother is very well, Jane says, but lame and cannot get about much: she saw her only six weeks ago—for they came out by the overland route. Only six weeks ago!—to hear that one has seen my dear mother so recently as that, makes it seem almost as though *I* had seen her but yesterday. My darling mother!—whom my conduct so grieved and outraged at the time, and who was so quick to forgive me and to do so much for me. What a message she has sent me! “Give my love to dear Mary, and say I hope she is happy with her sisters.” Elizabeth, too, sent me her love. “I saw your little Arthur, Mrs. Layne,” Jane Cale then said to my sister: “he is a sweet little fellow; your mother and Elizabeth are so fond of him. They call him Baby Arthur.” I felt my face growing whiter than death: but Susan, who was never I believe put out in her life, quietly sent me away with a

message to the nurse—that she might bring the children. When I got back, Captain Layne had come in and had the baby on his shoulder: for nurse had made more haste than I. “None of your children here are so fair as the little one your wife left in England, Captain Layne,” Jane Cale was saying, as she looked at them one by one. “You mean little Arthur,” returned the Captain in his ready kindness; “I hear he is fair.” “Have you never seen him?” “No: how should I have seen him?” asked Captain Layne, laughing: “he was born over there, and my wife left him behind her as a legacy to her mother. It is rather a hazard, Mrs. Cale, as perhaps you know, to bring out very young infants to this country.” Susan came to the rescue: she took the baby and put him on his feet, that Mrs. Cale should see how well he walked for his twelvemonth’s age. But it did not answer. No doubt Jane thought that the more she told them about Baby Arthur in England, the better pleased they would be. How much difference was there, she asked, between this child and little Arthur—eighteen months?—and how much between Arthur and the one above him? “Oh,” said the Captain, “if it comes to months, you must ask my wife. Come here, sir,” he called to Robert, who was tumbling over the little black bearer, “tell this lady how old *you* are, for I am sure I can’t.” “I’m over four,” lisped Bobby. “Ah, I see,” said Jane

Cale, "Baby Arthur is just between them."
"Exactly so," said Captain Layne: "Susan, I think these children may go to their own quarters now." They went at once, for I have trained them to be obedient, and I escaped with them. It is the first time any human tongue has spoken to me of Baby Arthur. I think if Captain Layne had looked at me I should have died: but he is ever kind. Never, by so much as a word, or look, or tone, since the hour when I first set foot on these shores, his wife's humbled sister, his children's meek governess—and it is more than good of him to entrust their training to *me*!—never has he betrayed that he as much as knew anything, still less thought of it.

Oh, how events have been smoothed for me!—how much more than I deserve have I to be thankful for!

[Letter from Captain Layne's Wife to her Mother at Church Dykely.]

Calcutta, September 2nd.

MY DARLING MOTHER,

I am sitting down to answer your letter, which arrived by last mail: for I am sure you must wonder at my long silence and think it an age since I wrote. But the truth is, I have had a touch of my old complaint—intermittent fever—and it left me very weak and languid. I know you have an untiring correspondent in Eleanor. Perhaps that makes me a little negligent in writing home, though I am aware it ought not.

We were truly glad to welcome Mrs. Cale, because she had so recently come from you. I cannot say that I have seen much of her as yet, for it was just after she got out that my illness began ; and when I grew better my husband sent me to the hills for a change. Mary went with me and the children. She is the greatest comfort. Mother dear, in spite of what we know of, I do not think Mary has her equal for true worth in this world. You say that Mrs. Cale, in writing home to you, described Mary as being so altered ; so sad and subdued. Why, my dear mother, of course she is sad : how could it be otherwise ? I do not suppose, in her more recent life, she has ever felt other than the most intense sadness of mind ; no, not for one minute : and it is only to be expected that this must in time show itself in the countenance. I spoke to her about it one day ; it is a long, long while ago now ; saying I did not like to see her retain so much sadness. " It cannot be helped," she answered ; " sadness must always follow sin."

And now I must tell you, even at the risk of being misunderstood—though I am sure you know me too well to fear I should seek to countenance or excuse wrong-doing—that I think Mary takes an exaggerated view of the past. She seems to think it can never be wiped out, never be palliated. Of course in one sense, it never can : but I *don't* see why she need continue to feel this intense humiliation, as if she ought

to have a cordon drawn round her gown to warn all good folks off its contact. Look again at that persistent fancy of hers, always to wear black; it is the writing about her gown puts me in mind of it. Black, black, black : thin silk when the heat will allow, oftener a dreary, rusty-black-looking kind of soft muslin that is called here "black jaconite"—but I really don't know whether that's the way to spell the thing. During the late intense heat, we have talked her into a black-and-white muslin : that is, white, with huge black spots upon it in the form of a melon. Only once did I speak to her about wearing white, as we do ; I have never ventured since. She turned away with a shiver, and said white was no longer for her. Mother dear, if anyone ever lived to work out on earth their repentance for sin, surely it is Mary. The more I see of her innate goodness, the less can I understand the past. With her upright principles and strict sense of conscientiousness—and you know, mother dear, that Mary always had these, even as a child—I am unable to imagine how it could have been that—— But I won't go into that. And it may be that the goodness, so remarkable, would not have come out conspicuously but for the trial.

Mrs. Cale gave us such a nice account of "Baby Arthur." She says he is very fair and pretty. She has talked to other people about him—and of course we cannot tell her not to

talk. A brother officer of my husband's said to me yesterday :

" I hear your little boy at home is charming, Mrs. Layne. When shall you have him out ? "

" Not yet," I answered, " he was a very delicate baby, and I should not like to risk it. "

" Ah," said Major Grant, " that is why you left him in England. "

" My mother takes great care of him," I went on ; " it would break her heart if I were to bring him away from her. "

You will wonder at my writing all this : but it is so new a thing to hear " Baby Arthur " made a topic of discussion, and all through Mrs. Cale ! Talking of children, Eleanor is, I think, getting somewhat over her long-continued disappointment. Four years she has been married, and has none. It is certainly a pity, when she and Allan McAlpin are so well off. Not a family in Calcutta lives in better style than they—people here talk of the house of McAlpin Brothers as we at home talk of Rothschild's and Baring's. I am sure they must be very rich, and poor Eleanor naturally thinks where is the use of the riches when there's no child to leave them to. Eleanor said to me the other day when she was here, " You might as well make over that child of yours to me, Susan,"—meaning Baby Arthur ; " he does you no good, and must be a trouble to mamma and Elizabeth. " Of course I laughed it off ; saying that you

and Elizabeth would not part with him for untold gold. And I believe it is so, is it not, dear mother? Do you remember when I first went to your house with the poor little infant, after his birth on the Continent, you took him out of my arms with a jerk and an averted face, as if you'd rather have pitched him on the floor, and Elizabeth turned away and groaned? "Mother," I said, "you may get to love the child in time, and then you'll be more ready to forgive and forget." And that has come to pass.

Mary has always been against our not telling the truth to Eleanor; she says, even yet, that she feels like a hypocrite before her; but I feel sure it was best and wisest. Eleanor is as sensitive in her way as Mary is; Eleanor holds a high position in the place; she and her husband are both courted, she for herself, he for his riches, for his high commercial name, for his integrity; and I know she would have *felt* the slur almost as keenly as Mary. It is true I do not like deliberate deceit; but there was really no need to tell her—it would not have answered any good end. Until Mrs. Cale talked, Eleanor scarcely remembered that there was a Baby Arthur; and now she seems quite jealous that he is mine and she cannot have him. I say to Eleanor that she must be contented with the good she has: her indulgent husband, her good position. We poor officers' wives cannot compete with her in grandeur. By the way, talking

of officers, you will be glad to hear that my husband expects his majority. It will be a welcome rise. For, with our little ones and our many expenses, it is rather difficult at times to make both ends meet. We shall come into money some time from the West Indies ; but until then every pound of additional pay is welcome.

Mrs. Cale told us another item of news ; that is she recounted it amidst the rest, little thinking what it was to us. That Sir G. C. is married, and living with his wife at the Grange with Lady C. You have been keeping the fact back, dear mother ; either through not choosing to mention their names, or out of consideration for Mary. But I can assure you she was *thankful* to hear of it ; it has removed a little of the abiding sting from her life. You cannot imagine how unselfish she is : she looks upon herself as the sole cause of all that occurred. I mean that she says it was through her going to the Grange. Had she not gone, the peace of mother and son would never have been disturbed. *I* think Lady C. was *selfish* and *wrong* ; that she ought to have allowed Sir G. to do as he wished. Mary says no ; that Lady C.'s comfort and her life-long feelings were above every other consideration. She admires Lady C. more than I do. However, she is truly glad to hear that the marriage took place. Events have fallen now into their original course, and she trusts that the bitter episode in which she took

part may be gradually forgotten at the Grange. The day we first heard of his marriage, I went hastily—and I fear you will say rudely—into Mary's room at night when she was preparing for rest, having omitted to tell her something I wished changed in Nelly's studies for the morning. She was on her knees, and rose up; the tears were literally streaming down her sweet face. "Oh, Mary, what is the matter?" I asked in a shock of dismay. "I was but praying for God to bless them," she answered simply. Is she not a good, unselfish girl?

I could fill a page with her praises. What she has been to my children, during these two years she has had them in charge, I can never tell. She insisted upon being regarded and treated wholly as a governess; but, as my husband says, no real governess could be half so painstaking, untiring, and conscientious. She has earned the respect of all Calcutta, and she shrinks from it as if it were something to be shunned, saying, "If people did but know!" Nelly, from being the only girl, and perhaps also because she was the eldest and her papa loved her so, was the most tiresome, spoiled little animal in the world; and the boys were boisterous, and I am afraid frightfully impudent to the native servants: but since Mary took them in hand they are altogether different, fit to be loved. Richard often says he wishes he could recompense her.

And now I must bring my letter to a close, or you will be tired. The children all send love to Grandmamma and Aunt Elizabeth : and (it is Miss Nelly calls out this) to little brother Arthur. Nelly is growing prettier every day : she is now going on for eleven. Young Richard promises to be as tall and fine a man as his father. I believe he is to be sent home next year to the school attached to King's College in London. Little Allan is more delicate than I like to see him ; Bobby, a frightful Turk ; baby, a dear little fellow. Master Allan's godfather, Eleanor's husband, gave him a handsome present on his last birthday—a railway train that would “go.” He had sent for it from England : I am sure it never cost less than five pounds ; and the naughty child broke it before the day was out. I felt so vexed ; and downright ashamed to confess it to Eleanor. The Ayah said he broke it for the purpose, “to see what it was made of ;” and in spite of entreaties to the contrary, Richard was on the point of whipping him for the mischief, and Allan was roaring in anticipation, when Mary interposed, and begged to be let deal with him for it. What she said, or what she did, I don't know ; I'm sure there was no whipping ; but • Master Allan was in a penitential and subdued mood for days after it, voluntarily renouncing some pudding that he is uncommonly fond of, because he had “not been good.” Richard says

that he would rather trust his children to Mary, to be made what they ought to be, than to any one under heaven. Oh, it is grievous—that her life should have been blighted!

My best love to you and Elizabeth, dearest mother, in which Richard begs to join; and believe me, your affectionate daughter,

SUSAN LAYNE.

P. S.—I have never before written openly on these private matters: we have been content tacitly to ignore them to each other, but somehow my pen has run on incautiously. Please, therefore, to burn this letter when you and Elizabeth shall have read it.*

[*From Miss Mary Layne's Journal, about two years yet later.*]

October 9th.—I quite tremble at the untoward turn things seem to be taking. To think that a noble gentleman should be casting his thoughts on *me*! And he *is* a gentleman, and a noble one also, in spite of that vain young adjutant, St. George's, slighting remark when Mr. McAlpin came in last night—"Here's that confounded old warehouseman!" It was well the Major did not hear him. He has to take St. George

* But old Mrs. Layne did not burn the letter: or else it would never have found its way into Duffham's collection. She was content to put it off from day to day, just as people do put off things; and it was never done.—J. L.

to task on occasion, and he would have done it then with a will.

Andrew McAlpin is not an ordinary man. Head of a wealthy house, whose integrity has never been questioned; himself of unsullied honour, of handsome presence, of middle age, for surely, in his three-and-fortieth year, he may be called it—owner of all these solid advantages, he has actually turned his attentions upon me. Me! Oh, if he did but know!—if he could but see the humiliation it brings to this already too humiliated heart.

Has a glamour been cast over his sight—as they say in his own land? Can he not see how I shrink from people when they notice me by chance more than common? Does he not see how constantly I have tried to shrink from *him*? If I thought that this had been brought about by any want of precaution on my part, I should be doubly miserable. When I was assistant-teacher at school in England, the French governess, poor old Madame de Visme, confided to me something that she was in the habit of doing; it was nothing wrong in itself, but totally opposed to the arbitrary rules laid down, and, if discovered, might have caused her to be abruptly dismissed. “But suppose it were found out, madame?” I said. “Ah non, mon enfant,” she answered; “je prends mes précautions.” Since then I have often thought of the words: and I say to myself, now as I write,

have I taken precautions—proper ones? I can hardly tell. For one thing, I was at first, and for some time, so totally unprepared: it would no more have entered my mind to suppose Mr. McAlpin would think of paying attention to me, than that the empty-headed Lieutenant St. George—who boasts that his family is better than anybody's in India, and intends to wed accordingly if he weds at all—would pay it.

When it first began—and that is so long ago that I can scarcely remember, nearly a year, though—Mr. McAlpin would talk to me about the children. I felt proud to answer him, dear little things; and I knew he liked them, and Allan is his brother's godchild, and Robert is Eleanor's. I am afraid that is where I was wrong: when he came talking, evening after evening, I should have been on my guard, and begged Susan to excuse me from appearing as often as she would. The great evil lies in my having consented to appear at all in company. For two years after I came out—oh, more than that; it must have been nearly three—I resolutely refused to join them when they were not alone. It was Major Layne's fault that the rule was broken through. One day, when invitations were out for an evening party, Susan came to me and said that the Major particularly requested I would appear at it. "The fact is, Mary," she whispered, "there has been

some talk at the mess: you are very much admired—your face, I mean—and some of them began wondering whether there was any *reason* for your never appearing in society; and whether you could really be my sister. Richard was not present—that goes without telling—the Colonel repeated it to him afterwards in a joking way. But what the Major says is this, Mary—that he knows India and gossiping tongues better than you do, and he desires for all our sakes, for yours of course especially, that you will now and then show yourself with us. You are to begin next Tuesday evening. Richard *begs* you will. And I have been getting you a black net dress, with a little white lace for the body—you cannot say that's too fine." The words "for all our sakes" decided it; and I said I would certainly obey Major Layne. What else could I do?

That was the beginning of it. Though I go out scarcely ever with the Major and Susan, declining invitations on the plea of my duties as governess, it has certainly grown into a habit with me to spend my evenings with them when they are at home.

But I never supposed anything like this would come of it. It has always seemed to me as if the world could see me a little as I see myself, and not think of me as one eligible to be chosen. As soon as I suspected that Mr. McAlpin came here for me, I strove to show

him as plainly as I might that he was making a mistake. And now this proves, as it seems to me, how wrong it was not to tell my sad story to Eleanor, but to let her think of me as one worthy yet. Susan knows how much against its suppression I was ; but she overruled me, and she said Richard thought with her. Eleanor would have whispered it to her husband, and he might have whispered to his brother Andrew, and this new perplexity have been spared. It is not for my own sake I am so sorry, but for his: crosses and vexations are only my due, and I try to take them patiently ; but I grow hot with shame every time I think how he is deceived. Oh, if he would but speak out, and end it ! that I might thank him and tell him it is impossible : I would like to say unfit. Susan might give him a hint ; but when I urge her to do so, she laughs at me and asks How can she, until he has spoken ?

October 25th.—It has come at last. Mr. McAlpin, one of the best men amidst the honourable men of the world, has asked me to become his wife. While I was trying to answer him, I burst into tears. We were quite alone. “ Why do you weep ? ” he asked, and I answered that I thought it was because of my gratitude to him for his kindness, and because I was so unworthy of it. It was perhaps a hazardous thing to say—but I was altogether confused. I must have explained myself badly, for he could

not or would not understand my refusal ; he said he certainly should decline to take it : I must consider it well—for a week—or a month—as long as I liked, provided I said “ Yes ” at last. When the crying fit was over, I felt all myself again ; and I told him, just as quietly and calmly as I could speak, that I should never marry ; never. He asked *why*, and as I was hesitating what reason to give, and praying to be helped to speak right in the emergency, we were interrupted.

Oh, if I could but tell him the naked truth, as I here write it ! That the only one living man it would be possible for me to marry is separated from me wider than seas can separate. The barrier was flung up between us years ago, never to be overstepped by either of us : while at the same time it shut me out from my kind. For this reason I can never marry, and never shall marry, so long as the world, for me, endures.

November 19th.—This is becoming painful. Mr. McAlpin will not give me up. He is all consideration and respect, he is not obtrusive, but yet—he will not give me up. There can exist no good reason why I should not have him, he says ; and he is willing to wait for months and years. Eleanor comes in with her remonstrances : “ Whatever possesses you, Mary ? You must be out of your mind, child, to refuse Andrew McAlpin. For goodness’ sake, get a

little common sense into your poor crotchety head." Allan McAlpin, in his half-earnest, half-joking way, says to me, "Miss Layne, I make a perfect husband ; ask Eleanor if I don't ; and I know Andrew will make a better." It is so difficult for me to parry these attacks. The children even have taken it up : and Master Richard to-day in the school-room called me Mrs. McAlpin. Susan has tried to shield me throughout. The Major says not a word one way or the other.

A curious idea has come across me once or twice lately—that it might be almost better to give Mr. McAlpin a hint of the truth. Of course it is *but* an idea ; one that can never be carried out ; but I know that he would be true as steel. I cannot bear for him to think me ungrateful : and he must consider me both ungrateful and capricious. I respect him and like him very very much, and he sees this : if I were at liberty as others are, I would gladly marry him : the great puzzle is, how to make him understand that it is not possible. I suppose the consciousness of my secret, which never leaves me, renders it more difficult for me to be decisive than it would be if I possessed none. Not the least painful part of it all is, that he brings me handsome presents, and will not take them back again. He is nearly old enough to be my father, he says, and so I must consider them as given

to me in that light. How shall I stop it?—how convince him?

November 29th.—Well, I have done it. Last night there was a grand dinner at the mess; some strangers were to join it on invitation; Susan went to spend a quiet hour with the Colonel's wife, and Mr. McAlpin came in, and found me alone. What possessed me I cannot tell: but I went all over in a tremble. He asked what was the matter, and I took courage to say that I always now felt distressed to see him come in, knowing he came for my sake, and that I could not respond to him as he wished. We had never had so serious a conversation as the one that ensued. He begged me to at least tell him what the barrier was, and where it lay: I thought he almost hinted that it was due to him. "There is some particular barrier, I feel sure," he said, "although Eleanor tells me there is none." And then I took some more courage, inwardly hoping to be helped to speak for the best, and answered Yes, there *was* a barrier; one that could never be surmounted; and that I had tried to make him see this all along. I told him how truly I esteemed him; how little I felt in my own eyes at being so undeserving of the good opinion of a good man; I said I should thank him for it in my heart for ever. Did the barrier lie in my loving another? he asked, and I hesitated there. I *had* loved another, I said: it was before I came out, and

the circumstances attending it were very painful ; indeed it was a painful story altogether. It had blighted my life ; it had isolated me from the world ; it entirely prevented me from ever thinking of another. I do believe he gathered from my agitation something of the truth, for he was so kind and gentle. Eleanor knew nothing of it, I said ; Major and Mrs. Layne had thought there was no need to tell her, and, of course, he would understand that I was speaking to him in confidence. Yes, he answered, in confidence that I should not find misplaced. I felt happier and more at ease with him than I had ever done, for now I knew that misapprehension was over ; and we talked together on other matters peacefully, until Major Layne entered and brought a shock with him.

A shock for me. One of the guests at the mess came with him : a naval officer in his uniform : a big man of fifty or sixty years, with a stern countenance and a cloud of untidy white hair. "Where's Susan ?" cried the Major : "out? Come here, then, Mary : you must be hostess." And before I knew what or who it was, I had been introduced to Admiral Chavasse. My head was in a whirl, my eyes were swimming : I had not heard the name spoken openly for years. Major Layne little thought he was related to G. C. : Mr. McAlpin had no idea that this fine naval officer, Parker Chavasse, could be cousin to one of whom I had been speaking

covertly, but had not named. The Admiral is on cruise, has touched at Calcutta, and his vessel is lying in Diamond Harbour.

November 30th.—Oh dear! oh dear! That I should be the recipient of so much goodness, and not be able to appreciate it!

A message came to the school-room this morning; Miss Layne was wanted downstairs. It was Susan who sent, but I found Mr. McAlpin alone. He had been holding a confidential interview with Susan: and Susan, hearing how much I had said to him last night, confided to him all. Oh, and he was willing to take me still; to take me as I am! I fell down at his feet sobbing when I told him that it could not be.

[*Private Note from Major Layne's Wife to her Mother at Church Dykely.*]

Just half-a-dozen lines, my dear mother, for your eye alone: I enclose them in my ordinary letter, meant for the world in general, as well as you. Mr. McAlpin knows *all*; but he was still anxious to make her his wife. He thinks her the best and truest girl, excellent among women. Praise from him *is* praise. It was, I am certain, a most affecting interview; but they were alone. Mary's refusal—an absolute one—was dictated by two motives. The one is, that the old feelings hold still so much sway in her heart (and, she says, always will) as to

render the idea of a union with anyone else absolutely distasteful. The other motive was consideration for Andrew McAlpin. "I put it to you what it would be," she said to him, "if at any time after our marriage, whether following closely upon it, or in years to come, this story of mine should transpire? I should *die* with shame, with grief for your sake : and there could be no remedy. No, no ; never will I subject you, or anyone else, to that frightful chance."

And, mother, she is right. In spite of Mr. McAlpin's present disappointment, I know he thinks her so. It has but increased his admiration for her. He said to me, "Henceforth I shall look upon her as a dear younger sister, and give her still my heart's best love and reverence."

And this is the private history of the affair : I thought I ought to disclose it to you. Richard, while thinking she has done right, says it is altogether an awful pity (he means inclusive of the past), for she's a trump of a girl. And so she is. Ever yours, dear mother,

SUSAN LAYNE.

PART THE THIRD.

IT was a lovely place, that homestead of Chavasse Grange, as seen in the freshness of the summer's morning : and my Lady Chavasse, looking from her window as she dressed, might be thinking so. The green lawn, its dew-drops sparkling in the sun, was dotted with beds of many-coloured flowers ; the thrush and black-bird were singing in the surrounding trees ; the far-off landscape, stretched around in the distance, was beautiful for the eye to rest upon.

Nearly hidden by great clusters of roses, some of which he was plucking, and talking at the same time to the head-gardener who stood by, was a well-looking gentleman of some five-and-twenty years. His light morning-coat was flung back from the snowy white waistcoat, across which a gold chain passed, its seal drooping ; a blue necktie, just as blue as his blue eyes, was carelessly tied round his neck. He might have been known for a Chavasse by those self-same eyes, for they had been his father's—Sir Peter—before him.

“About those geraniums that you have put out, Markham,” he was saying. “How came you to do it? Lady Chavasse is very angry : she wanted them kept in the pots.”

“Well, Sir Geoffry, I only obeyed orders,”

replied the gardener—who was new to the place.
“Lady Rachel told me to do it.”

“Lady Rachel did? Oh, very well. Lady Chavasse did not understand that, I suppose.”

Up went Lady Chavasse’s window at this juncture. “Geoffry.”

Sir Geoffry stepped out from amid the roses, and smiled as he answered her.

“Ask Markham about the geraniums, Geoffry—how he could dare to do such a thing without orders.”

“Mother, Rachel bade him do it. Of course she did not know that you wished it not done.”

“Oh,” curtly replied Lady Chavasse. And she shut down the window again.

By this it will be seen that the wishes of the two ladies at Chavasse Grange sometimes clashed. Lady Rachel, though perhaps regarded as second in authority, was fond of having her own way, and took it when she could. Lady Chavasse made a show of deferring to her generally; but she had reigned queen so long that she found it irksome, not to say humiliating, to yield the smallest point to her son’s wife.

They were sitting down to breakfast when Sir Geoffry went in, in the room that had once been the garden-parlour. It had been re-embellished since those days, and made the breakfast-room. Lady Chavasse was but in her forty-fourth year; a young woman, so to say, beautiful still, and excellently-well preserved. She

wore a handsome dress of green muslin, with a dainty little cap of lace on her rich brown hair. Sir Geoffry's wife was in white ; she looked just the same as when she was Rachel Derreston ; her perfect features pale, and cold, and faultless.

Geoffry Chavasse laid a rose by the side of each as he sat down. *He* was the only one changed ; changed since the light-hearted days before that episode of sin and care came to the Grange. It had soon passed away again ; but somehow it had left its mark on him. His face seemed to have acquired a weary kind of look ; and the fair bright hair was getting somewhat thin upon the temples. Sir Geoffry was in Parliament ; but he had now paired off for the short remainder of the session. Sometimes they were all in London : sometimes Sir Geoffry would be there alone ; or only with his wife : the Grange was their chief and usual home.

They began talking of their plans for the day. Sir Geoffry had to ride over some portion of the estate ; Lady Rachel thought she must write some letters ; Lady Chavasse, who said her head ached, intended to go out in her new carriage.

It was ordered to the door in the course of the morning : this pretty toy carriage, which had been a recent present from Geoffry to his mother. Low and light in build, it was something like a basket chaise, but much more elegant, and the boy-groom, in his natty postilion's dress, sat the horse. Lady Chavasse, a light shawl thrown

over her green muslin, and a white bonnet on, stood admiring the turn-out, her maid, who had come out with the parasol, by her side.

“Wilkins,” said her ladyship, suddenly, “run and ask Lady Rachel whether she is sure she would not like to go with me?”

The woman went, and returned. “Lady Rachel’s love and thanks, my lady, but she would prefer to get her letters done.”

So Lady Chavasse went alone, taking the road to Church Dykely. The hedges were blooming with wild roses and woodbine, the sweet scent of the hay filled the air, the sky was blue and cloudless. But the headache was making itself sensibly felt; and my lady, remembering that she had often had these headaches lately, began wondering whether Duffham the surgeon could give her anything to cure them.

“Giles,” she cried, leaning forward. And the boy-groom turned and touched his cap.

“My lady?”

“To Mr. Duffham’s.”

So in the middle of the village, at Mr. Duffham’s door, Giles pulled up. The surgeon, seeing who it was, came out, and handed his visitor indoors.

Lady Chavasse had not enjoyed a gossip with Mr. Duffham since before her last absence from home. She rather liked one in her coldly condescending way. And she stayed with him in the surgery while he made up some medicine

for her, and told her all the village news. Then she began talking about her daughter-in-law.

"Lady Rachel seems well, but there is a little fractiousness of temper perceptible now and then; and I fancy that, with some people, it denotes a state of not perfect health. There are *no* children, Mr. Duffham, you see. There have been no signs of any."

"Time enough for that, my lady."

"Well—they have been married for—let me recollect—nearly fourteen months. I do hope there will be children! I am anxious that there should be."

The surgeon happened to meet her eyes as she spoke, and read the anxiety seated in them.

"You see—if there were none, and anything happened to Sir Geoffry, it would be the case of the old days—my case over again. Had my child proved to be a girl, the Grange would have gone from us. You do not remember that; you were not here; but your predecessor, Mr. Layne, knew all about it."

Perhaps it was the first time for some three or more years past that Lady Chavasse had mentioned voluntarily the name of Layne to the surgeon. It might have been a slip of the tongue now.

"But there's nothing likely to happen to Sir Geoffry, Lady Chavasse," observed Duffham, after an imperceptible pause. "He is young and healthy."

“ I know all that. Only it would be pleasant to feel we were on the safe side—that there was a son to succeed. If anything did happen to him, and he left no son, the Grange would pass away from us. I cannot help looking to contingencies: it has been my way to do so all my life.”

“ Well, Lady Chavasse, I sincerely hope the son will come. Sir Geoffry is anxious on the point, I dare say.”

“ He makes no sign of being. Sir Geoffry seems to me to have grown a little indifferent in manner of late, as to general interests. Yesterday afternoon we were talking about making some improvements at the Grange, he and I ; Lady Rachel was indoors at the piano. I remarked that it would cost a good deal of money, and the question was, whether it would be worth while to do it. ‘ My successor would think it so, no doubt,’ cried Sir Geoffry. ‘ I hope that will never be Parker Chavasse ; I should not like him to reign here,’ I said hastily. ‘ If it is, mother, I shall not be alive to witness it,’ was his unemotional answer.”

“ Lady Chavasse, considering the difference between the admiral’s age and Sir Geoffry’s, I should say there are thirty chances against it,” was Duffham’s reply, as he began to roll up the bottle of mixture in white paper.

While he was doing this, a clapping of tiny hands attracted Lady Chavasse’s attention to the window, which stood open. A little boy

had run out of Mrs. Layne's door opposite, and stood on the pavement in admiration of the carriage, which the boy-groom was driving slowly about. It was a pretty child of some three years old, or thereabouts, in a brown holland pinafore strapped round the waist, his little arms and legs and neck bare, and his light hair curling.

"Oh g'andma, look! G'andma, come and look!" he cried—and the words were wafted distinctly to Lady Chavasse.

"Who *is* that child, Mr. Duffham? I have seen him sometimes before. Stay, though, I remember—I think I have heard. He belongs to that daughter of Mr. Layne's who married the soldier of the same name. A lieutenant, or some grade of that kind, was he not?"

"Lieutenant Layne then; Captain Layne now," carelessly replied Mr. Duffham. "Hopes to get his majority in time, no doubt."

"Oh indeed. I sometimes wonder how people devoid of family connections manage to obtain rapid promotion. The grandmother takes care of the child, I suppose. Quite a charge for her."

Mr. Duffham, standing now by her side, glanced at Lady Chavasse. Her countenance was open, unembarrassed: there was no sign of ulterior thought upon it. Evidently a certain event of the past was not just then in her remembrance.

"How is the old lady?" she asked.

"Middling. She breaks fast. I doubt, though, if one of her daughters will not go before her."

Lady Chavassee turned quickly at the words.

"I speak of the one who is with her—Miss Elizabeth Layne," continued Mr. Duffham, busily rolling up the bottle. "Her health is failing : I think seriously ; though she may linger for some time yet."

There was a pause. Lady Chavassee looked hard at the white knobs on the drug-drawers. But that she began to speak, old Duffham might have thought she was counting how many there were of them.

"The other one—Miss Mary Layne—is she still in that situation in India ? A governess, or something of the kind, we heard she went out to be."

"Governess to Captain Layne's children. Oh yes, she's there. And likely to be, the people over the way seem to say. Captain and Mrs. Layne consider that they have a treasure in her."

"Oh, I make no doubt she would do her duty. Thank you : never mind sealing it. I will be sure to attend to your directions, Mr. Duffham."

She swept out to the carriage, which had now drawn up, and stepped over the low step into it. The surgeon put the bottle by her side, and saluted her as she drove away. Across the road trotted the little fellow in the pinafore.

"Did oo see dat booful tarriage, Mis'er Duffham ? I'd like to 'ide in it."

"You would, would you, Master Arthur," returned the surgeon, hoisting the child for a

moment on his shoulder, and then setting him on his feet again, as Miss Layne appeared at the door. "Be off back : there's Aunt Elizabeth looking angry. It's against the law, you know, sir, to run out beyond the house."

And the little lad ran over at once obediently.

Nearly three years back—not quite so much by two or three months—Church Dykely was gratified by the intelligence that Captain Layne's wife—then sojourning in Europe—was coming on a short visit to her mother with her three or four weeks' old baby. Church Dykely welcomed the news, for it was a sort of break to the monotonous, jog-trot village life, and warmly received Mrs. Richard Layne and the child on their arrival. The infant was born in France, where Mrs. Richard Layne had been staying with one of her sisters—Mary—and whence she had now come direct to her mother's ; Mary having gone on to Liverpool to join Mrs. Richard Layne's other children. The baby—made much of by the neighbours—was to remain with old Mrs. Layne : Mrs. Richard Layne did not deem it well to take so young a child to India, as he seemed rather delicate. Church Dykely said how generous it was of her to sacrifice her motherly feelings for the baby's good—but the Laynes had always been unselfish. She departed, leaving the child. And Baby Arthur, as all the place called him, lived and thrived, and was now grown as fine a little

fellow for his age as might be, with a generous spirit and open heart. My Lady Chavassee (having temporarily forgotten it when speaking with Mr. Duffham) had heard all about the child's parentage just as the village had—that he was the son of Captain Richard Layne and his wife Susan. Chavassee Grange generally understood the same, including Sir Geoffry. There was no intercourse whatever between the Layne family and the Grange; there had not been any since Miss Mary Layne quitted it. My Lady Chavassee was in the habit of turning away her eyes when she passed Mrs. Layne's house: and in good truth, though perhaps her conscience reminded her of it at these moments, she had three parts forgotten the unpleasant episode of the past.

And the little boy grew and thrived: and became as much a feature in Church Dykely as other features were—say the bridge over the mill-stream, or the butcher's wife—and was no more thought of, in the matter of speculation, than they were.

Miss Elizabeth Layne caught hold of the young truant's hand with a jerk and a reprimand, telling him he'd be run over some day. She had occasion to tell it him rather often, for he was of a fearless nature. Mr. Duffham nodded across the road to Miss Elizabeth.

"Are you better to-day?" he called out. People don't stand on ceremony in these rural places.

“Not much, thank you,” came the answer.

For Miss Elizabeth Layne had been anything but strong lately ; her symptoms looking very like those that herald in consumption.

The time rolled on, bringing its changes. You have already seen it rolling on in Calcutta, for in this, the third part, we have had to go back a year or two.

Elizabeth Layne died. Mrs. Layne grew very feeble, and it was thought and said by everybody that one of her daughters ought to be residing with her. There was only one left unmarried—Mary. Mary received news in India of this state of things at home, together with a summons from her mother. Not at all a peremptory summons. Mrs. Layne wrote a few shaky lines, praying her to come “if she’d not mind returning to the place :” if she did mind it, why she, the mother, must die alone as she best could. There was a short struggle in Mary Layne’s heart ; a quick, sharp battle, and she gave in. Her duty to her mother lay before aught else of obligation in God’s sight ; and she would yield to it. As soon as preparations for her voyage could be made, she embarked for England.

It was autumn when she got home, and Church Dykely received her gladly. Mary Layne had always been a favourite in the place

from the time her father, the good-hearted, hard-working surgeon, had fondly shown her, his youngest and fairest child, to the public, a baby of a few days old. But Church Dykely found her greatly changed. They remembered her as a blooming girl; she came back to them a grave woman, looking older than her years, and with a pale sweet countenance that seemed never to have a smile on it. She was but six-and-twenty yet.

Miss Layne took up her post at once by the side of her ailing mother. What with attending her and attending to Baby Arthur—whom she took into training at once just as she had taken the children in India—she found her time fully occupied. The boy, when she returned, was turned five. She went out very rarely; never—except to church, or at dusk—when the family were at the Grange, for she seemed to have a dread of meeting them. Church Dykely wondered that Miss Layne did not call at the Grange, considering that she had been humble companion there before she went out, or that my lady did not come to see her; but supposed the lapse of time had caused the acquaintance-ship to fall through.

Mary had brought good news from India. Her sister Eleanor, Mrs. Allan McAlpin, had a little girl, to the great delight of all concerned. Just when they had given it up as a bad job, and decided that it was of no good to hope any

longer, the capricious infant arrived. Major Layne told his wife confidentially that Allan McAlpin was prouder of that baby than any dog with two tails.

And henceforth this was to be Mary Layne's home, and this her occupation—the caring for her mother, so long as the old lady should be spared, and the gentle leading to good of the child, Arthur. Mrs. Layne, lapsing into her dotage, would sit in her favourite place, the parlour window, open when the weather allowed it, watching people as they passed. Mary's smooth and bright brown hair might be seen in the background, her head drooping over the book she was reading to Mrs. Layne, or over her work when the old lady got tired of listening, or over Master Arthur's lessons at the table. Not only lessons to fit him for this world did Mary teach him; but such as would stand him in good aid when striving onwards for the next. Twice a day, morning and evening, would she take the child alone, and talk to him of Heaven, and things pertaining to it. Aunt Elizabeth's lessons had been mostly on the score of behaviour: the other kind of instruction had been all routine at the best. Mary remedied this, and she had an apt little scholar. Seated on her knee, his bright blue eyes turned up to her face, the child would listen and talk, and say he would be a good boy always, always. The tears wet his eyelashes at her Bible stories:

he would put his little face down on her bosom, and whisper out a sobbing wish that Jesus would love *him* as He had loved the little children on earth. There is no safeguard like this seed sown in childhood: if withheld, nothing can replace it in after-life.

They grew the best and greatest friends, these two. Whether Mary loved him, or not, she did not say; she was ever patient and thoughtful with him, with a kind of grave tenderness. But the child grew to love her more than he had ever loved anyone in his young life. One day, when he did something wrong and saw how it grieved her, his repentant sobs nearly choked him. It was very certain that Mary had found the way to his heart, and might mould him for good or for ill.

The child was a chatterbox. Aunt Elizabeth used to say he ought to have the tip cut off his tongue. He seemed never tired of asking about papa and mamma in India, and Allan and Bobby and the rest, and the elephants and camels—and Dick the eldest, who was in London, at the school attached to King's College.

"When will they come over to see us, Aunt Mary?" he questioned one day, when he was on Mary's knee.

"If grandmamma's pretty well we will have Dick down at Christmas."

"Is Dick to be a soldier like papa?"

"I think so."

"I shall be a soldier too."

There was an involuntary tightening of her hands round him—as if she would guard him from *that*.

"I hope not, Arthur. One soldier in a family's enough; and that is to be Richard."

"Is papa a very big big brave man with a flashing sword?"

"Major Layne is tall and very brave. He wears his sword sometimes."

"Oh, Aunt Mary, I should like to be a soldier and have a sword! When I can write well enough I'll write a letter to papa to ask him. I'd like to ride on the elephants."

"They are not as good to ride as horses."

"Is mamma as pretty as you?" demanded Master Arthur after a pause.

"Prettier. I am pale and"—sad, she was going to say, but put another word—"quiet."

"When you go back to India, Aunt Mary, shall you take me? I should like to sail in the great ship."

"Arthur dear, I do not think I shall go back."

And so Miss Mary Layne—she was Miss Layne now—stayed on. Church Dykely would see a slender, grave young lady, dressed generally in black silk, whose sweet face seemed to have too careworn an expression for her years. But if her countenance was worn and weary, her heart was not. That seemed full of love and charity for all; of

gentle compassion for any wrong-doer, of sympathy for the sick and suffering. She got to be revered, and valued, and respected as few had ever been in Church Dykely : certainly as none had, so young as she was. Baby Arthur, clacking his whip as he went through the street on his walks by the nurse-girl Betsey's side, his chattering tongue never still ; now running into the blacksmith's shed to watch the sparks ; now perching himself on the top of the village stocks ; and now frightening Betsey out of her senses by attempting to leap the brook—in spite of these outdoor attractions, Baby Arthur was ever ready to run home to Aunt Mary, as though she were his best treasure.

When Miss Layne had been about six months at her mother's, a piece of munificent good fortune befel her—as conveyed to her in official and non-official communications from India. Andrew McAlpin—the head of the great McAlpin house in Calcutta, who had respected Mary Layne above all women, and had wished to marry her, as may be remembered—Andrew McAlpin was dead, and had left some of his accumulated wealth to Mary. It would amount to six hundred a year, and was bequeathed to her absolutely ; at her own disposal to will away when she in turn should die. In addition to this, he directed that the sum of one thousand pounds should be paid to her at once. He also left a thousand pounds to Mrs. Richard Layne

—but that does not concern us. This good man's death brought great grief to Mary. It had been the result of an accident: he lay ill but a few weeks. As to the fortune—well, of course that was welcome, for Mary had been casting many an anxious thought to the future on sundry scores, and what little money she had been able to put by, out of the salary as governess at Major Layne's, was now nearly exhausted. She thought she knew why Mr. McAlpin had thus generously remembered her: and it was an additional proof of the thoughtful goodness which had ever characterised his life. Oh, if she could but have thanked him! if she had but known it before he died! He had been in the habit of corresponding with her since her return to Europe, for she and he had remained firm friends, but the thought of ever benefiting by him in this way had never entered her head. As how should it?—seeing that he was a strong man, and only in the prime of life. She mourned his loss; she thought she could best have spared any other friend; but all the regrets in the world would not bring him back to life. He was gone. And Allan McAlpin was now sole head of the wealthy house, besides inheriting a vast private fortune from his brother. Eleanor McAlpin, once Eleanor Layne, might well wish for more children amidst all her riches.

The first thing Mary Layne did with some of this thousand pounds—which had been conveyed

to her simultaneously with the tidings of the death—was to convey her mother to the seaside for a change, together with Baby Arthur and the nurse, Betsey. Before quitting home she held one or two interviews with James Spriggings, the house agent, builder, and decorator, and left certain orders with him. On their return, old Mrs. Layne did not know her house. It had been put into substantial and ornamental repair inside and out, and was now one of the prettiest, not to say handsomest, in the village. All the old carpets were replaced by handsome new ones, and a good portion of the furniture was new. Pillars had been added to the rather small door, giving it an imposing appearance, iron outside railings had taken the place of the old ones. Mrs. Layne, I say, did not know her house again.

“My dear, why have you done it?” cried the old lady, looking about her in amazement. “Is it not a waste of money?”

“I think not, mother,” was the answer. “Most likely this will be my home for life. Perhaps Arthur’s home after me. At least it will be his until he shall be of an age to go out in the world.”

Mrs. Layne said no more. She had got of late very indifferent to outward things. Aged people do get so, and Mr. Duffham said her system was breaking up. The seaside air had done her good; they had gone to it in May,

and came back in August. Mary added a third servant to the household, and things went on as before in their quiet routine.

One afternoon in September, when they had been at home about a month, Mary went out, and took Arthur. She was going to see a poor cottager who had nursed herself, Mary, when she was a child, and who had recently lost her husband. When they came to the gates of Chavasse Grange, past which their road lay, Master Arthur made a dead standstill, and wholly declined to proceed. The child was in a black velvet tunic, the tips of his white drawers just discernible beneath it, and his legs bare, down to the white socks: boys of his age were dressed so then. As bonny a lad for his six years as could be seen anywhere, with a noble, fearless bearing. Mary wore her usual black silk, a rich one too, with a little crape on it; the mourning for Mr. McAlpin. Arthur was staring over the way through the open gates of the Grange.

“I want to go in and see the peacock.”

“Go in and see the peacock!” exclaimed Miss Layne, rather struck aback by the demand. “What can you mean, Arthur?—The peacock is up by the house.”

“I know it is. We can go up there and see it, Aunt Mary.”

“Indeed we cannot, Arthur. I never heard of such a thing.”

“Betsey lets me go.”

The confession involved all kinds of thoughts, and a flush crossed Miss Layne's delicate face. The family were not at the Grange, as she knew: they had gone up to London in January, when Parliament met, and had never returned since: but nevertheless she did not like to hear of this intrusion into the grounds of the nurse and child. The peacock had been a recent acquisition; or, as Arthur expressed it, had just “come to live there.” When he had talked of it at home, Mary supposed he had seen it on the slopes in passing. These green slopes, dotted here and there with shrubs and flowers, came down to the boundary wall that skirted the highway. The avenue through the gates wound round abruptly, hiding itself beyond the lodge.

“Come, my dear. It is already late.”

“But, Aunt Mary, you *must* see the peacock. He has got the most splendid tail. Sometimes he drags it behind him on the grass, and sometimes it's all spread out in a beautiful round, like that fan you brought home from India. Do come.”

Miss Layne did not reply for the moment. She was inwardly debating upon what plea she could forbid the child's ever going in again to see the peacock: the interdiction would sound most arbitrary if she gave none. All at once, as if by magic, the peacock appeared in view, strutting down the slopes, its proud tail, in all

its glory, spread aloft in the rays of the declining sun.

It was too much for Arthur. With a shout of delight he leaped off the low foot-path, flew across the road, and in at the gates. In vain Mary called : in his glad excitement he did not so much as hear.

There ensued a noise as of the fleet foot of a horse, and then a crash, a man's shout, and a child's cry. What harm had been done? In dire fear Mary Layne ran to see, her legs trembling under her.

Just at the sharp turn beyond the lodge, a group stood : Sir Geoffry Chavasse had Arthur in his arms ; his horse, from which he had flung himself, being held and soothed by a mounted groom. The lodge children also had come running out to look. She understood it in a moment : Sir Geoffry must have been riding quickly down from the house, his groom behind him, when the unfortunate little intruder encountered him just at the turn, and there was no possibility of pulling up in time. In fact, the boy had run absolutely on to the horse's legs.

She stood, white, and faint, and sick, against the wall of the lodge : not daring to look into the accident—for Mary Layne was but a true woman, timid and sensitive ; as little daring to encounter Sir Geoffry Chavasse, whom she had not been close to but for a few months short of

seven years. That it should have occurred!—that this untoward thing should have occurred!

“I wonder whose child it is?” she heard Sir Geoffry say—and the well-remembered tones came home to her with a heart-thrill. “Poor little fellow! could it have been my fault, or his? Dovey”—to the groom—“ride on at once and get Mr. Duffham here. Never mind my horse: he’s all right now. You can lead him up to the house, Bill, my lad!”

The groom touched his hat, and rode past Mary on his errand. Sir Geoffry was already carrying the child to the Grange; Bill, the eldest of the lodge fry, following with the horse. All in a minute, a wailing cry burst from Arthur.

“Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary! Oh, please let her come! I want Aunt Mary.”

And then it struck Sir Geoffry Chavasse that a gentleman’s child, such as this one by his appearance evidently was, would not have been out without an attendant. He turned round, and saw a lady in black standing by the lodge. The wailing cry set in again.

“Aunt Mary! I want Aunt Mary.”

There was no help for it. She came on with her agitated face, from which every drop of blood had faded. Sir Geoffry, occupied with the child, did not notice her much.

“I am so grieved,” he began; “I trust the

injury will be found not to be very serious. My horse——”

He had lifted his eyes then, and knew her instantly. His own face turned crimson ; the words he had been about to say died unspoken on his lips. For a moment they looked in each other's faces, and might have seen, had the time been one of less agitation, how markedly sorrowful care had left its traces there. The next, they remembered the present time, and what was due from them.

“ I beg your pardon : Miss Layne, I think ? ” said Sir Geoffry, contriving to release one hand and raise his hat.

“ Yes, sir,” she answered, and bowed in return.

He sat down on the bank for a moment to get a better hold of the child. Blood was dripping from one of the little velvet sleeves. Sir Geoffry, carrying him as gently as was possible, made all haste to the house. The window of what had been the garden-parlour stood open, and he took him into it at once. Ah, how they both remembered it ! It had been refurnished and made grand now : but the room was the room still. Sir Geoffry had returned home that morning. His wife and Lady Chavasse were not expected for a day or two. Scarcely any servants were as yet in the house ; but the woman who had been left in charge, Hester

Picker, came in with warm water. She curtsied to Miss Layne.

"Dear little fellow!" she exclaimed, her tongue ready as of old. "How did it happen, sir?"

"My horse knocked him down," replied Sir Geoffry. "Get me some linen, Picker."

The boy lay on the sofa where he had been put, his hat off, and his pretty light brown hair falling from his face, pale now. Apparently there was no injury save to the arm. Sir Geoffry looked at Mary.

"I am a bit of a surgeon," he said. "Will you allow me to examine his hurt as a surgeon would? Duffham cannot be here just yet."

"Oh yes, certainly," she answered.

"I must cut his velvet sleeve up."

And she bowed in acquiescence to that.

Hester Picker came in with the linen. Before commencing to cut the sleeve, Sir Geoffry touched the arm here and there, as if testing where the damage might lie. Arthur cried out.

"That hurts you," said Sir Geoffry.

"Not much," answered the little fellow, trying to be brave. "Papa's a soldier, and I want to be a soldier, so I won't mind a little hurt."

"Your papa's a soldier? Ah, yes, I think I remember," said Sir Geoffry, turning to Mary. "It is the little son of Captain Layne."

"My papa is Major Layne now," spoke up Arthur before she could make any answer. "He and mamma live in India."

“And so you want to be a soldier, the same as papa?” said Sir Geoffry, testing the basin of water with his finger, which Picker was holding, and which had been brought in full hot.

“Yes, I do. Aunt Mary there says No, and grandmamma says No; but—oh, what’s that?”

He had caught sight of the blood for the first time, and broke off with a shuddering cry. Sir Geoffry was ready now, and had the scissors in his hand. But before using them he spoke to Miss Layne.

“Will you sit here while I look at it?” he asked, putting a chair with its face to the open window, and its back to the sofa. And she understood the motive and thanked him: and said she would walk about outside.

By-and-by, when she was tired of waiting, and all seemed very quiet, she looked in. Arthur had fainted. Sir Geoffry was bathing his forehead with eau de Cologne; Picker had run for something in a tumbler, and wine stood on the table.

“Was it the pain?—did it hurt him very badly?” asked Mary, supposing that the arm had been bathed and perhaps dressed.

“I have not done anything to it; I preferred to leave it for Duffham,” said Sir Geoffry—and at the same moment she caught sight of the velvet sleeve laid open, and something lying on it that looked like a mass of linen.” Mary turned even whiter than the child.

“Do not be alarmed,” said Sir Geoffry. “Your little nephew is only faint from the loss of blood. Drink this,” he added, bringing her a glass of wine.

But she would not take it. As Sir Geoffry was putting it on the table, Arthur began to revive. Young children are elastic—ill one minute, well the next; and he began to talk again.

“Aunt Mary, are you there?”

She moved to the sofa, and took his uninjured hand.

“We must not tell grandmamma, Aunt Mary. It would frighten her.”

“Bless his dear little thoughtful heart!” interjected Hester Picker. “Here comes something.”

The something proved to be a fly, and it brought Mr. Duffham. Before the groom had reached the village, he overtook this said fly and the surgeon in it, who was then returning home from another accident. Turning round at the groom’s news—“Some little child had run against Sir Geoffry’s horse, and was hurt”—he came up to the Grange.

When Mr. Duffham saw that it was *this* child, he felt curiously taken to. Up the room and down the room looked he; then at Sir Geoffry, then at Miss Layne, then at Hester Picker, saying nothing. Last of all he walked up to the sofa and gazed at the white face lying there.

"Well," said he, "and what's this? And how did it happen?"

"It was the peacock," Arthur answered. "I ran away from Aunt Mary to look at it, and the horse came."

"The dear innocent!" cried Hester Picker. "No wonder he ran. It's a love of a peacock."

"Don't you think it was very naughty, young sir, to run from your aunt?" returned Mr. Duffham.

"Yes, very; because she had told me not to. Aunt Mary, I'll never do it again."

The two gentlemen and Hester Picker remained in the room, Mary again left it. The arm was crushed rather badly; and Mr. Duffham knew it would require care and skill to cure it.

"You must send to Worcester for its best surgeon to help you," said the baronet, when the dressing was over. I feel that I am responsible to Major Layne."

Old Duffham nearly closed his eyelids as he glanced at the speaker. "I don't think it necessary," he said; "no surgeon can do more than I can. However, it may be satisfactory to Major Layne that we should be on the safe side, so I'll send."

When the child was ready, Mary got into the fly, which had waited, and Mr. Duffham put him to lie on her lap.

"I hope, Miss Layne, I may be allowed to

call to-morrow and see how he gets on," said Sir Geoffry at the same time. And she did not feel that it was possible for her to say No. Mr. Duffham got up beside the driver ; to get a sniff, he said, of the evening air.

"How he is changed ! He has suffered as I have," murmured Mary Layne to herself, as her tears fell on Baby Arthur, asleep now. "I am very thankful that he has no suspicion."

The child had said, "Don't tell grand-mamma"; but to keep it from Mrs. Layne was simply impracticable. With the first stopping of the fly at the door, out came the old lady ; she had been marvelling what had become of them, and was wanting her tea. Mr. Duffham took her in again, and said a few words, making light of it, before he lifted out Baby Arthur.

A skilful surgeon was at the house the next day, in conjunction with Mr. Duffham. The arm and its full use would be saved, he said ; its cure effected ; but the child and those about him must have patience, for it might be rather a long job. Arthur said he should like to write to his papa in India, and tell him that it was his own fault for running away from Aunt Mary ; he could write letters in big text hand. The surgeon smiled, and told him he must wait to write until he could use both arms again.

The doctors had not left the house many minutes when Sir Geoffry Chavasse called,

having walked over from the Grange. Miss Layne sent her mother to receive him, and disappeared herself. The old lady, her perceptions a little dulled with time and age, and perhaps also her memory, felt somewhat impressed and flattered at the visit. To her it almost seemed the honour that it used to be: that one painful episode of the past seemed to be as much forgotten at the moment as though it had never had place. She took Sir Geoffry upstairs.

Arthur was lying close to the window, in the good light of the fine morning. It was the first clear view Sir Geoffry had obtained of him. The garden-parlour at the Grange faced the east, so that the room on the previous evening, being turned from the setting sun, had been but shady at the best, and the sofa was at the far end of it. As Sir Geoffry gazed at the child now, the face struck him as being like somebody's; he could not tell whose. The dark blue eyes especially, turned up in all their eager brightness to his, seemed quite familiar.

"He says I must not write to papa until I get well," said Arthur, who had begun to look on Sir Geoffry as an old acquaintance.

"Who does?" asked the baronet.

"The gentleman who came with Mr. Duffham."

"He means the doctor from Worcester, Sir Geoffry," put in old Mrs. Layne. She was sitting in her easy-chair near, as she had been

previously ; her spectacles keeping the place between the leaves of the closed Bible, which she had again taken on her lap ; her withered hands, in their black lace mittens and frilled white ruffles, were crossed upon the Book. Every now and then she nodded with incipient sleep.

“ I am so very sorry this should have happened,” Sir Geoffry said, turning to Mrs. Layne. “ The little fellow was running up to get a look at the peacock, it seems ; and I was riding rather fast. I shall never ride fast round that corner again.”

“ But, Sir Geoffry, they tell me that the child ran right against you at the corner : that it was no fault of yours at all, sir.”

“ It was my fault, grandmamma,” said Arthur. “ And, Sir Geoffry, that’s why I wanted to write to papa ; I want to tell him so.”

“ I think I had better write for you,” said Sir Geoffry, looking down at the boy with a smile.

“ Will you ? Shall you tell him it was my fault ?”

“ No. I shall tell him it was mine.”

“ But it was not yours. You must not write what is not true. If Aunt Mary thought I could tell a story, or write one, oh, I don’t know what she’d do. God hears all we say, you know, sir.”

Sir Geoffry smiled—a sad smile—at the earnest words, at the eager look in the bright

eyes. Involuntarily the wish came into his mind that *he* had a brave, fearless-hearted, right-principled son, such as this boy evidently was.

"Then I think I had better describe how it happened, and let Major Layne judge for himself whether it was my fast riding or your fast running that caused the mischief."

"You'll tell about the peacock? It had its tail out."

"Of course I'll tell about the peacock. I shall say to Major Layne that his little boy—I don't think I have heard your name," broke off Sir Geoffry. "What is it?"

"It's Arthur. Papa's is Richard. My big brother's is Richard too; he is at King's College. Which name do you like best, sir?"

"I think I like Arthur best. It is my own name also."

"Yours is Sir Geoffry."

"And Arthur as well."

But at this juncture old Mrs. Layne, having started up from a nod, interposed to put a summary stop to the chatter, telling Arthur in a cross tone that Mr. Duffham and the other doctor had forbid him to talk much. And then she begged pardon of Sir Geoffry for saying it, but thought the doctors wished the child to be kept quiet and cool. Sir Geoffry took the opportunity to say adieu to the little patient.

"May I come to see the peacock when I get well, Sir Geoffry?"

“Certainly. You shall come and look at him for a whole day if grandmamma will allow you to.”

Grandmamma gave no motion or word of assent, but Arthur took it for granted. “Betsey can bring me if Aunt Mary won’t; Betsey’s my nurse, sir. I wish I could have him before that window to look at while I lie here to get well. I like peacocks and musical boxes better than anything in the world.”

“Musical boxes!” exclaimed Sir Geoffry. “Do you care for them?”

“Oh yes; they are beautiful. Do you know the little lame boy who can’t walk, down Pie-finch Cut? His father comes to do grandmamma’s garden. Do you know him, Sir Geoffry? His name’s Reuben.”

“It’s Noah, the gardener’s son, sir,” put in Mrs. Layne aside to Sir Geoffry. “He was thrown downstairs when a baby, and has been a cripple ever since.”

But the eager, intelligent eyes were still cast up, waiting for the answer. “Where *have* I seen them?” mentally debated Sir Geoffry, alluding to the eyes.

“I know the name,” he answered.

“Well, Reuben has got a musical box, and it plays three tunes. He is older than I am: he’s ten. One of them is the ‘Blue Bells of Scotland.’”

Sir Geoffry nodded and got away. He went

straight over to Mr. Duffham's, and found him writing a letter in his surgery.

"I hope the child will do well," said the baronet, when he had shaken hands. "I have just been to see him. What an intelligent, nice little fellow it is."

"Oh, he will be all right again in time, Sir Geoffry," was the doctor's reply, as he began to fold his letter.

"He is a pretty boy, too, very. His eyes are strangely like some one's I have seen, but for the life of me I cannot tell whose?"

"*Really?*—do you mean it?" cried Mr. Duffham, speaking, as it seemed, in some surprise.

"Mean what?"

"That you cannot tell."

"Indeed I can't. They puzzled me all the while I was there. Do you know? Say, if you do."

"They are like your own, Sir Geoffry."

"Like my own!"

"They are your own eyes over again. And yours—as poor Layne used to say, and as the picture in the Grange dining-room shows us also, for the matter of that—are Sir Peter's. Sir Peter's, yours, and the child's: they are all the same."

For a long space of time, as it seemed, the two gentlemen gazed at each other. Mr. Duffham with a questioning and still surprised

look : Sir Geoffry in a kind of bewildered amazement.

“ Duffham ! you—you—Surely it is not *that* child !”

“ Yes, it is.”

He backed to a chair and stumbled into it, rather than sat down ; somewhat in the same manner that Mrs. Layne had backed against the counter nearly seven years before and upset the scales. The old lady seemed to have aged since quicker than she ought to have done : but her face then had not been whiter than was Geoffry Chavasse’s now.

“ Good heavens !”

The dead silence was only broken by these murmured words that fell from his lips. Mr. Duffham finished folding his note, and directed it.

“ Sir Geoffry, I beg your pardon ! I beg it a thousand times. If I had had the smallest notion that you were ignorant of this, I should never have spoken.”

Sir Geoffry took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Some moisture had gathered there.

“ How was I to suspect it ?” he asked.

“ I never supposed but that you must have known it all along.”

“ All along from when, Duffham ?”

“ From—from—well, from the time you first knew that a child was over there.”

Sir Geoffry cast his thoughts back. He could not remember anything about the child's coming to Church Dykely. In point of fact, the Grange had been empty at the time.

"I understood that the child was one of Captain and Mrs. Layne's," he rejoined. "Everybody said it; and I never had any other thought. Even yesterday at the Grange you spoke of him as such, Duffham."

"Of course. Miss Layne was present—and Hester Picker—and the child himself. I did not speak to deceive you, Sir Geoffry. When you said what you did to me in coming away, about calling in other advice for the satisfaction of Major Layne, I thought you were but keeping up appearances."

"And it *is* so, then !"

"Oh dear, yes."

Another pause. Mr. Duffham affixed the stamp to his letter, and put the paper straight in his note-case. Sir Geoffry suddenly lifted his hand, like one whom some disagreeable reflection overwhelms.

"To think that I was about to write to Major Layne ! To think that I should have stood there, in the old lady's presence, talking boldly with the child ! She must assume that I have the impudence of Satan."

"Mrs. Layne is past that, Sir Geoffry. Her faculties are dulled : three parts dead. *That* need not trouble you."

The baronet put aside his handkerchief and took his hat to leave. He began stroking its nap with his coat-sleeve.

“Does my mother know of this, do you think?”

“I am sure she neither knows it nor suspects it. No one does, Sir Geoffry: the secret has been entirely kept.”

“The cost of this illness must be mine, you know, Duffham.”

“I think not, Sir Geoffry,” was the surgeon’s answer. “It would not do, I fear. There’s no need, besides: Miss Layne is rich now.”

“Rich! How is she rich?”

And Mr. Duffham had to explain. A wealthy gentleman in India, some connection of the Laynes’, had died and left money to Mary Layne. Six or seven hundred a year; and plenty of ready means. Sir Geoffry Chavassee went out, pondering upon the world’s changes.

He did not call to see the invalid again; but he bought a beautiful musical box at Worcester, and sent it in to the child by Duffham. It played six tunes. The boy had never in his life been so delighted. He returned his love and thanks to Sir Geoffry; and appended several inquiries touching the welfare of the peacock.

The first news heard by Lady Chavassee and Lady Rachel on their coming home, was of the accident caused to Major Layne’s little son, by Sir Geoffry’s horse. Hester Picker and the other servants were full of it. It happened to

be the day that Sir Geoffry had gone to Worcester after the box, so he could not join in the narrative. A sweet, beautiful boy, said Hester to my ladies, and had told them he meant to be a soldier when he grew up, as brave as his papa. Lady Chavasse, having digested the news, and taken inward counsel with herself, decided to go and see him : it would be right and neighbourly, she thought. It might be that she was wishing to bestow some slight mark of her favour upon the old lady before death should claim her : and she deemed that the honour of a call would effect this. In her heart she acknowledged that the Laynes had behaved admirably well in regard to the past ; never to have troubled her or her son by word or deed or letter ; and in her heart she felt grateful for it. Some people might have acted so differently.

“I think I will go and see him too,” said Lady Rachel.

“No, pray don’t,” dissented Lady Chavasse, hastily. “You already feel the fatigue of your journey, Rachel : do not attempt to increase it.”

And as Lady Rachel really was fatigued and did not care much about it, one way or the other, she remained at home.

It was one of Mrs. Layne’s worst days—one of those when she seemed three parts childish—when Lady Chavasse was shown into the drawing-room. Mary was there. As she turned to receive her visitor, and heard the maid’s an-

nouncement "Lady Chavassee," a great astonishment inwardly stirred her, but her manner remained quiet and self-possessed. Just a minute's gaze at each other. Lady Chavassee was the same good-looking woman as of yore; not changed, not aged by so much as a day. Mary *was* changed: the shy, inexperienced girl had grown into the calm, self-contained woman; the woman who had known sorrow, who had got its marks impressed on her face. She had been pretty once, she was gravely beautiful now. Perhaps Lady Chavassee had not bargained for seeing *her*; Mary had certainly never thought thus to meet Lady Chavassee: but here they were, face to face, and each must make the best of it. As they did; and with easy courtesy, both being gentlewomen. Lady Chavassee held out her hand, and Mary put hers into it.

After shaking hands with Mrs. Layne—who was too drowsy properly to respond, and shut her eyes again—my lady spoke a few pleasant words: of regret for the accident, of her wish to see the little patient, of her hope that Major and Mrs. Layne might not be allowed to think any care on Sir Geoffry's part could have averted it. Mary went upstairs with her. Lady Chavassee could but be struck with the improved appearance of the house, quite suited now to be the abode of gentle-people; and with its apparently well-appointed if small household.

The child lay asleep: his nurse, Betsey, sat

sewing by his side. The girl confessed that she had allowed him sometimes to run in and take a look at the peacock. Lady Chavasse would not have him awakened : she bent and kissed his cheek lightly ; and talked to Mary in a whisper. It was just as though there had been no break in their acquaintanceship, just as though no painful episode, in which they were antagonistic actors, had ever occurred between them.

“ I hear you have come into a fortune, Miss Layne,” she said, as she shook hands with Mary again in the little hall before departure. For Hester Picker had told of this.

“ Into a great deal of money,” replied Mary.

“ I am glad to hear it ; *glad*,” came the parting response, whispered emphatically in Mary’s ear, and it was accompanied by a pressure of the fingers.

Mr. Duffham was standing at his door, watching my lady’s exit from Mrs. Layne’s house, his eyes lost in wonder. Seeing him, she crossed over, and went in, Mr. Duffham throwing open the door of his sitting-room. She began speaking of the accident to Major Layne’s little son, — what a doleful pity it was, but that she hoped he would do well. Old Duffham replied that he hoped so too, and thought he would.

“ Mrs. Layne seems to be getting very old,” went on Lady Chavasse. “ She was as drowsy as she could be this afternoon : she seemed scarcely to know me.”

“Old people are apt to be sleepy after their dinner,” returned the doctor.

And then there was a pause. Lady Chavassee (as Duffham’s diary expresses it) seemed to be particularly absent in manner, as if she were thinking to herself, instead of talking to him. Because he had nothing else to say, he asked after the health of Lady Rachel. That aroused her at once.

“She is not strong. She is not strong. I am sure of it.”

“She does not seem to ail much, that I can see,” returned Duffham, who often had to hear this same thing said of Lady Rachel. “She never requires medical advice.”

“I don’t care: she is not strong. There are no children,” continued Lady Chavassee, dropping her voice to a whisper; and a kind of piteous, imploring expression darkened her eyes.

“No.”

“Four years married, going on for five, and no signs of any. No signs of children, Mr. Duffham.”

“I can’t help it, my lady,” returned Duffham.

“Nobody can help it. But it is an awful misfortune. It is beginning to be a great trouble in my life. As the weeks and months and years pass on—the *years*, Mr. Duffham—and bring no hope, my very spirit seems to fail. ‘Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.’”

“True.”

“It has been the one great desire of my later years,” continued Lady Chavasse, too much in earnest to be reticent, “and it does not come. I wonder which is the worst to be borne ; some weighty misfortune that falls and crushes, or a longed-for boon that we watch and pray for in vain ? The want of it, the eager daily strain of disappointment, has become to me worse than a nightmare.”

Little Arthur Layne, attended by Betsey, spent a day at the Grange on his recovery, invited to meet the peacock. The ladies were very kind to him : they could but admire his gentle manners, his fearless bearing. Sir Geoffry played a game at ninepins with him on the lawn—which set of ninepins had been his own when a child, and had been lying by ever since. Betsey was told she might carry them home for Master Layne : Sir Geoffry gave them to him.

After that, the intercourse dropped again, and they became strangers as before. Except that Lady Chavasse would bow from her carriage if she saw Mrs. or Miss Layne, and Sir Geoffry raise his hat. The little boy got more notice : when they met him out, and were walking themselves, they would, one and all, stop and speak to him.

So this episode of the accident seemed to fade into the past, as other things had faded : and the time went on.

PART THE FOURTH.

AUTUMN leaves were strewing the ground, autumn skies were over head. A ray of the sun came slantwise into the library, passing right across the face of Sir Geoffry Chavasse. The face had an older expression on it than his thirty years would justify. It looked worn and weary, and the bright hair, with its golden tinge, was less carefully arranged than it used to be, as if exertion were getting to be a burden, or that vanity no longer troubled him ; and his frame was almost painfully thin ; and a low hacking cough took him at intervals. It might have been thought that Sir Geoffry was a little out of health, and wanted a change. Lady Chavasse, his mother, had begun to admit a long-repressed doubt whether any change would benefit him.

A common desk of stained walnut-wood was open on the table before him : he had been reading over and putting straight some papers it contained—notes and diaries, and such like. Two or three of these he tore across and threw into the fire. Out of a bit of tissue paper, he took a curl of bright brown hair, recalling the

day and hour when he had surreptitiously cut it off, and refused to give it up again to its blushing owner. Recalling also the happy feelings of that time—surreptitiously still, as might be said, for what business had he with them now? Holding the hair to his lips for a brief interval, he folded it up again, and took out another bit of paper. This contained a lady's ring of chased gold set with a beautiful and costly emerald. In those bygone years he had bought the ring, thinking to give it in payment of the stolen hair; but the young lady in her shyness had refused so valuable a present. Sir Geoffry held the ring so that its brightness glittered in the sun, and then wrapped it up again. Next he unfolded a diary, kept at that past period, and for a short while afterwards: then it was abruptly broken off, and had never since been written in. He smiled to himself as he read a page here and there—but the smile was full of sadness.

Lady Chavasse came into the room rather abruptly: Sir Geoffry shut up the diary, and prepared to shut and lock the desk. There was a disturbed, restless, and anxious look on my lady's face: there was a far more anxious and bitter pain ever making havoc with her heart.

“Why, Geoffry! have you got out *that* old desk?”

Sir Geoffry smiled as he carried it to its obscure place in a dark corner of the library.

When he was about twelve years old, and they were passing through London, he went to the Lowther Arcade and bought this desk, for which he had been saving up his shillings.

"I don't believe any lad ever had so valuable a prize as I thought I had purchased in that desk, mother," was his laughing remark.

"I dare say it has a vast deal of old rubbish in it," said Lady Chavassee, slightly.

"Not much else—for all the good it can ever be. I was but glancing over the rubbish—foolish mementoes of foolish days. These days are weary; and I hardly know how to make their hours fly."

Lady Chavassee sighed at the words. He used to go shooting in the autumn—fishing—hunting once in a way, in the later season: he had not strength for these sports now.

Opening the desk he commonly used, a very handsome one that had been Lady Chavassee's present to him, he took a small book from it and put it into his breast-pocket. Lady Chavassee, watching all his movements, as she had grown accustomed to do, saw and knew what the book was—a Bible. Perhaps nothing had struck so much on my lady's fears as the habit he had fallen into of reading often the Bible. She had come upon him doing it in all kinds of odd places. Out amidst the rocks at the seaside, where they had recently been staying—and should have stayed longer but that he got tired

and wanted to come home ; out in the seats of this garden, amidst the roses, or where the roses had been ; in the library ; in his dressing-room—Lady Chavasse would see him with this small Bible. He always slipped it away when she or anyone else approached : but the habit was casting on her spirit a very ominous shadow. It seemed to show her that he knew he must be drawing near to the world that the Bible tells of, and was making ready for his journey. How her heart ached, ached always, Lady Chavasse would not have liked to avow.

“Where’s Rachel ?” he asked.

“On her sofa, upstairs.”

Sir Geoffry stirred the fire mechanically, his thoughts elsewhere—just as he had stirred it in a memorable interview of the days gone by. Unconsciously they had taken up the same position as on that unhappy morning : he with his elbow on the mantel-piece, and his face partly turned from his mother ; she in the same chair, and on the same red square of the Turkey carpet. The future had been before them then : it lay in their own hands, so to say, to choose the path for good or for ill. Sir Geoffry had pointed out which was the right one to take, and said that it would bring them happiness. But my lady had negatived it, and he could only bow to her decree. And so, the turning tide was passed, not seized upon, and they had been

sailing since on a sea tolerably smooth, but without depth in it or sunshine on it. What had the voyage brought forth? Not much. And it seemed, so far as one was concerned, nearly at an end now.

"I fancy Rachel cannot be well, mother," observed Sir Geoffry. "She would not lie down so much if she were."

"A little inertness, Geoffry, nothing more. About Christmas?" continued Lady Chavasse. "Shall you be well enough to go to the Derrestons', do you think!"

"I think we had better let Christmas draw nearer before laying out any plans for it," he answered.

"Yes, that's all very well: but I am going to write to Lady Derreston to-day, and she'll expect me to mention it. Shall you like to go?"

A moment's pause, and then he turned to her: his clear, dark blue eyes, ever kind and gentle, looking straight into hers; his voice low and tender.

"I do not suppose I shall ever go away from the Grange again."

She turned quite white. Was it coming so near as that? A kind of terror took possession of her.

"Geoffry! *Geoffry!*"

"My darling mother, I will stay with you if I can; you know that. But the fiat does not lie with you or with me."

Sir Geoffry went behind her chair, and put his arms round her playfully, kissing her with a strange tenderness of heart that he sought to hide.

"It may be all well yet, mother. Don't let it trouble you before the time."

She could not make any rejoinder, could not speak, and quitted the room to hide her emotion.

In the after part of the day the surgeon, Duffham, bustled in. His visit was later than usual.

"And how are you, Sir Geoffry?" he asked, as they sat alone, facing each other between the table and the fire.

"Much the same, Duffham."

"Look here, Sir Geoffry—you should rally both yourself and your spirits. It's of no use *giving way* to illness. There's a certain listlessness upon you; I've seen it for some time. Shake it off."

"Willingly—if you will give me the power to do so," was Sir Geoffry's reply. "The listlessness you speak of proceeds from the fact that my health and energies fail me. As to my spirits, there's nothing the matter with them."

Mr. Duffham turned over with his fingers a glass paper-weight that happened to lie on the table, as if he wanted to see the fishing-boats on the sea that its landscape represented, and then he glanced at Sir Geoffry.

"Of course you wish to get well?"—with a slight emphasis on the "wish."

"Most certainly I wish to get well. For my mother's sake—and of course also for my wife's, as well as for my own. I don't expect to, though, Duffham."

"Well, that's saying a great deal," retorted Duffham, pretending to make a mock of it.

"I've not been strong for some time—as you may have seen, perhaps: but since the beginning of May, when the intensely hot weather came in, I have felt as—as——"

"As what, Sir Geoffry?"

"As though I should never live to see another May, hot or cold."

"Unreasonable heat has that effect on some people, Sir Geoffry. Tries their nerves."

"I am not aware that it tries mine. My nerves are as sound as need be. The insurance offices won't take my life at any price, Duffham," he resumed.

"Have you tried them?"

"Two of the best in London. When I began to grow somewhat doubtful about myself in the spring, I thought of the future of those near and dear to me, and would have insured my life for their benefit. The doctors refused to certify. Since then I have felt nearly sure in my own mind that what must be will be. And, day by day, I have watched the shadow drawing nearer."

The doctor leaned forward and spoke a few earnest words of encouragement, before departing. Sir Geoffry was only too willing to receive them—in spite of the inward conviction that lay upon him.

Lady Rachel Chavasse entered the library in the course of the afternoon. She wore a sweeping silk, the colour of lilac, and gold ornaments. Her face had not changed : with its classically-carved contour and its pale coldness.

“Does Duffham think you are better, Geoffry?”

“Not much, I fancy.”

“Suppose we were to try another change—Germany, or somewhere?” she calmly suggested.

“I would rather be here than anywhere, Rachel.”

“I should like you to get well, you know, Geoffry.”

“I should like it too, my dear.”

“Mamma has written to ask us to go into Somersetshire for Christmas,” continued Lady Rachel, putting her foot, encased in its black satin shoe and white silk stocking, on the fender.

“Ay. My mother was talking about it just now. Well, we shall see between now and Christmas, Rachel. Perhaps they can come to us instead.”

Lady Rachel turned her very light eyes upon her husband : eyes in which there sat often a

peevish expression. It was not discernible at the present moment : they were coldly calm.

“ Don’t you think you shall be quite well by Christmas ?”

“ I cannot speak with any certainty, Rachel.”

She stood a minute or two longer, and then walked round the room before the shelves, in search of some entertaining book. It was quite evident that the state of her husband did not bring real trouble to her heart. Was the heart too naturally cold ?—or was it that as yet no suspicion of the seriousness of the case had penetrated to her ? Something of both, perhaps.

Selecting a book, she was leaving the library with it when Sir Geoffry asked if she would not rather stay by the fire to read. But she said she preferred to go to her sofa.

“ Are you well, Rachel ?” he asked.

“ My back feels tired, always. I suppose we are something alike, Geoffry—not over-strong,” she concluded with a smile.

That night Duffham made the annexed entry in his journal.

He does know the critical state he is in. Has known it, it seems, for some time. I suspected he did. Sir Geoffry’s one that you may read as a book in his open candour. He would “ get well if he could,” he says, for his mother’s sake. As of course he would, were the result under his own control : a fine young fellow of

the upper ten, with every substantial good to make life pleasant, and no evil habits or thoughts to draw him back, would not close his eyes on this world without a pang, and a struggle to remain a while longer in it.

I cannot do more for him than I am doing. All the faculty combined could not. Neither do I say, as he does, that he will not get better : on the contrary, I think there's just a chance that he *will* : and I honestly told him so. It's just a toss up. He was always delicate until he grew to manhood : then he seemed to become thoroughly healthy and strong. Query : would this delicacy have come back again had his life been made as happy as it might have been ? My lady can debate that point with herself in after years : it may be that she'll have plenty of time to do it in. Sir Geoffry's is one of those sensitive natures where the mind seems almost wholly to influence the body ; and that past trouble was a sharp blow to him. Upright and honourable, he could not well bear the remorse that fell upon him—it has been keenly felt, ay, I verily believe, until this hour : another's life was blighted that his might be aggrandised. *My own opinion is, that had he been allowed to do as he wished, and make reparation, thereby securing his own happiness, he might have flung off the tendency to delicacy still and always ; and lived to be as old as his father, Sir Peter.* Should my lady ever speak to me upon the

subject, I shall tell her this. Geoffry Chavassee has lived with a weight upon him. It was not so much that his own hopes were gone and his love-dream wrecked, as that he had brought far worse than this upon another. Yes; my lady may thank herself that his life seems to have been wasted. Had there been children he might, in a degree, have forgotten what went before, and the mind would no longer have preyed upon the body. Has the finger of Heaven been in this? My pen ought to have written "*specially* in this:" for that Finger is in all things.

I hope he will get better. Yes, I *do*, in spite of a nasty doubt that crops up in my mind as I say it. I love him as I did in the old days, and respect him more. *Qui vivra verra*—to borrow a French phrase from young Master Arthur over the way. And now I put up my diary for the night.

Mrs. Layne was dead. Mary lived alone in her house now, with her servants and Arthur.

Never a woman so respected as she; never a lady, high or low, so revered and looked up to as Mary Layne. All the village would fly to her on an emergency; and she had both counsel and help to give. The poor idolised her. A noble, tender, good gentlewoman, with the characteristic humility in her bearing that had been observable of late years, and the

gentle gravity on her thoughtful face. My lady, with all her rank and her show and her condescension, had never been half so much respected as this. The little boy—in knickerbockers now, and nine years old—was a great favourite ; he also got some honour reflected on him through Colonel Layne. There had been a time of trouble in India, and Major Layne had grandly distinguished himself and gained honour and promotion. The public papers proclaimed his bravery and renown ; and Arthur got his share of reflected glory. As the boy passed on his pony, the blacksmith, Dobbs, would shoot out from his forge to look after him, and say to the stranger whose horse had cast a shoe, “ There goes the little son of the brave Colonel Layne : maybe ye’ve heerd of his deeds over in Ingee.” Perhaps the blacksmith considered he had acquired a kind of right in Arthur, since the pony—a sure-footed Welsh animal—was kept in the stable that belonged to his forge, and was groomed by himself or son. Miss Layne paid him for it ; but, as the blacksmith said, it went again the grain ; he’d ha’ been proud to do aught for her and the little gentleman without pay.

And somehow, what with one thing and another, my lady grew to think that if anything removed her from Chavasse Grange, Mary would take her place as best and chiefest in Church Dykely, and she herself would not be

missed. But it was odd the thought should dawn upon her. Previsions of coming events steal into the minds of a great many of us ; we know not whence they arise, and at first look on them but as idle thoughts, never recognising them for what they are—advance shadows of the things to be.

One sunshiny afternoon, close upon winter, Arthur and Mr. Duffham went out riding. Mary watched them start ; the doctor on his old grey horse (that had been her father's), and Arthur on his well-groomed pony. The lad sat well ; as brave-looking a little gentleman, with his upright carriage, open face, and nice attire—for Mary was particular there—as had ever gratified a fond aunt's eye, or a blacksmith's heart.

Close by the gates of Chavasse Grange, they met Sir Geoffry and his mother strolling forth. Mr. Duffham's hopes had not been fulfilled. Outwardly there was not much change in the baronet, certainly none for the better ; inwardly there was a great deal. He *knew* now how very certain his fate was, and that it might not be delayed for any great length of time ; a few weeks, a few months : as God should will.

"Lady Rachel is not well," observed Sir Geoffry to the surgeon. "You must see her, Duffham. I suppose you can't come in now?"

"Yes I can ; I'm in no hurry," was the doctor's answer.

"May I come too, and see the peacock, Sir Geoffry? I'll wait here, though, if Mr. Duffham thinks I ought."

Of course the boy was told that the peacock would take it as a slight if he did not pay him a visit, and they all turned up the avenue. Arthur got off his pony and led it, and talked with Lady Chavasse.

"Why did you get off yet?" asked Sir Geoffry, turning to him.

"Lady Chavasse is walking," answered the boy, simply.

It spoke volumes for his innate sense of politeness. Sir Geoffry remembered that *he* had possessed the same when a child.

"Have you heard what papa has done?" asked Arthur, putting the question generally. "It has been in all the newspapers, and he is full colonel now. Did you read it, Sir Geoffry?"

"Yes, I read it, Arthur."

"And the Queen's going to thank papa when he comes to England, and to make him Sir Richard. Everybody says so. Dobbs thinks papa will be made general before he dies."

Dobbs was the blacksmith. They smiled at this. Not at the possibility for Colonel Layne, but at Dobbs.

"And, with it all, Aunt Mary does not want me to be a soldier!" went on the boy in rather an aggrieved tone. "Richard's enough," she says. "Dick gets on so well at King's College :

he is to go to Woolwich next. I don't see the peacock!"

They had neared the house, but the gay-plumaged bird, for which Arthur retained his full admiration, was nowhere in sight. Servants came forward and led the horses away. Mr. Duffham went on to see Lady Rachel: Arthur was taken into the garden parlour by Sir Geoffry.

"And so you would like to be a soldier!" he said, holding the boy before him, and looking down at his bright, happy face.

"Oh, I should: very much. If papa says I am not to be—or mamma—or Aunt Mary—if they should tell me 'No no, you *shall not*,' why it would be at an end, and I'd try and like something else."

"Listen, Arthur," said Sir Geoffry, in a low earnest tone. "What you are to be, and what you are not to be, lie alike in the will of God. He will direct you aright no doubt, when the time of choice shall come——"

"And that's what Aunt Mary says," interrupted the lad. "She says—— there's the peacock!"

He had come round the corner, his tail trailing; the poor pea-hen following humbly behind him, as usual. Arthur went outside the window. The peacock had a most unsocial habit of stalking away with a harsh scream if approached; Arthur knew this, and stayed where he was, talking still with Sir Geoffry. When Lady

Chavasse entered, he was deep in a story of the musical box.

"Yes, a wicked boy went into Reuben Noah's, and broke his box for the purpose. Aunt Mary is letting me get it mended for him with some sixpences I had saved up. Reuben is very ill just now—in great pain; and Aunt Mary has let me lend him mine—he says when he can hear the music, his hip does not hurt him so much. You are not angry with me for lending it, are you, Sir Geoffry?"

"My boy, I am pleased."

"Why should Sir Geoffry be angry—what is it to him?" cried Lady Chavasse, amused with the chatter.

"Sir Geoffry gave it to me," said Arthur, looking at her with wide-open eyes, in which the great wonder that anybody should be ignorant of that fact was expressed. "Reuben wishes he could get here to see the peacock: but he can't walk, you know. I painted a beautiful one on paper and took it to him. Aunt Mary said it was not much like a real peacock; it was too yellow. Reuben liked it: he hung it up on his wall. Oh!"

For the stately peacock, stepping past the window as if the world belonged to him, suddenly threw wide his tail in an access of native vanity. The tail had not long been renewed, and was in full feather. Arthur's face went into a radiant glow. Lady Chavasse, smiling at the

childish delight, produced some biscuit that the peacock was inordinately fond of, and bade him go and feed it.

"Oh, Geoffry," she exclaimed in the impulse of the moment, as the boy vaulted away, "if you had but such a son and heir as that!"

"Ay. It might have been, mother. That child himself might have been Sir Arthur after me, had you so willed it."

"Been Sir Arthur after you!" she exclaimed. "Are you in a dream, Geoffry? *That* child!"

"I have thought you did not know him, but I never felt quite sure. He passes to the world for the son of Colonel Layne—as I trust he may so pass always. Don't you understand?"

It was so comical a thing, bringing up thoughts so astounding, and the more especially because she had never had the remotest suspicion of it, that Lady Chavasse simply stared at her son in silence. All in a moment a fiery resentment rose up in her heart: she could not have told at whom or what.

"I will never believe it, Geoffry. It *cannot* be."

"It *is*, mother."

He was leaning against the embrasure of the window as he stood, watching the boy in the distance throwing morsels of biscuit right into the peacock's mouth, condescendingly held wide to receive them. Lady Chavasse caught the strange sadness glistening in her son's eyes,

and somehow a portion of her hot anger died away.

"Yes : there was nothing to prevent it," sighed Sir Geoffry. "Had you allowed it, mother, the boy might have been born my lawful son, my veritable heir. Other sons might have followed him : the probability is, there would have been half a dozen of them feeding the peacock now, instead of—of—I was going to say of worse than none."

Lady Chavasse looked out at the boy with eager, devouring eyes : and whether there was more of longing in their depths, or of haughty anger, a spectator could not have told. In that same moment a vision, so vivid as to be almost like reality, stole before her mental sight—of the half-dozen brave boys crowding round the peacock, instead of only that one on whose birth so cruel a blight had been cast.

"A noble heir he would have made us, mother ; one of whom our free land might have been proud," spoke Sir Geoffry in a low tone of yearning that was mixed with hopeless despair. "He bears my name, Arthur. I'd give my right hand—aye, and the left too—if he could be Sir Arthur after me !"

Arthur turned round. His cap was on the grass, his blue eyes were shining.

"He is frightfully greedy and selfish, Lady Chavasse. He will not let the peahen have a bit."

“A beautiful face,” murmured Sir Geoffry. “And a little like what mine must have been at his age, I fancy. Sometimes I have thought that you would see the likeness, and that it might impart a clue.”

“Since when have you known him?—known this?”

“Since the day after the accident, when my horse threw him down. Duffham dropped an unintentional word, and it enlightened me. Some nights ago I dreamt that the little lad was my true heir,” added Sir Geoffry. “I saw you kiss him in the dream.”

“You must have been letting your thoughts run on it very much,” retorted Lady Chavasse, rather sharply.

“They are often running on it, mother: the regret for what might have been and for what is, never seems to leave me,” was his reply. “For some moments after I awoke from that dream I thought it was reality: I believe I called out ‘Arthur.’ Rachel started, and inquired between sleep and wake what the matter was. To find it was only a dream—to remember that what *is* can never be changed or redeemed in this world, was the worst pain of all.”

“You may have children yet,” said Lady Chavasse, after a pause. “It is not impossible.”

“Well, I suppose not impossible,” was the hesitating rejoinder. “But——”

“ But you don’t think it. Say it out, Geoffry.”

“ I do not think it. My darling mother, don’t you see how it is with me ?” he added in an impulse of emotion—“ that I am not to live. A very short time now, and I shall be lying with my father.”

A piteous cry broke from her. It had to be suppressed. The ungrateful peacock, seeing no more dainty biscuit in store, had fluttered off with a scream, putting his tail down into the smallest possible compass ; and Arthur came running back to the room. Mr. Duffham next appeared ; his face grave, his account of Lady Rachel evasive. He suspected some latent disease of the spine, but did not wish to say so just yet.

The horse and pony were brought round. Arthur and the doctor mounted : Arthur turning round to lift his cap to Lady Chavasse and Sir Geoffry as he rode away. A noble boy in all his actions ; sitting his pony like the young chieftain he ought to have been but for my lady’s adverse will.

But Mr. Duffham was by no means prepared for an inroad on his privacy made that evening by my lady. She surprised him in his shabbiest parlour when he was taking his tea : the old tin teapot on the Japan tray, and the bread-and-butter plate cracked across. Zuby Noah, Duffham’s factotum, was of a saving turn, and never would bring in the best things but on Sundays.

He had a battle with her over it sometimes, but it did no good. Duffham thought Lady Chavasse had come to hear about Lady Rachel, but he was mistaken.

She began with a despairing cry, by way of introduction to the interview : Zuby might have heard it as she went along the kitchen passage, but for her clanking pattens. The man-servant was out that evening, and Zuby was in waiting. Duffham, standing on the old hearth-rug, found his arm seized hold of by Lady Chavasse. He had never seen her in agitation like this.

“Is it to be so really? Mr. Duffham, can *nothing* be done? Is my son to die before my very eyes, and not be saved?”

“Sit down, pray, Lady Chavasse!” cried Duffham, trying to hand her into the chair that had the best-looking cushion on it, and wishing he had been in the other room and had not slipped on his worn old pepper-and-salt coat.

“He ought not to die—to die and leave no children!” she went on, as if she were a lunatic. “If there were but one little son—but one—to be the heir! *Can’t* you keep him in life? there may be children yet, if he only lives.”

Her eyes were looking wildly into his; her fingers entwined themselves about the old grey cuffs as lovingly as though they were of silk velvet. No: neither Duffham nor anybody else had ever seen her like this. It was as though she thought it lay with Duffham to keep

Sir Geoffry in life and to endow Chavasse Grange with heirs.

"Lady Chavasse, I am not in the place of God."

"Don't you care for my trouble? Don't you *care* for it?"

"I do care. I wish I could cure Sir Geoffry."

Down sat my lady in front of the fire, in her dire tribulation. By the way she stared at it, Duffham thought she must see in it a vision of the future.

"We shall have to quit the Grange, you know, if he should die: I and Lady Rachel. Better that I had quitted it in my young life; that I had never had a male child to keep me in it. I thought that would have been a hardship: but oh, it would have been nothing to this."

"You shall drink a cup of tea, Lady Chavasse—if you don't mind it's being poured out of this homely tea-pot," said Duffham.—"Confound that Zuby!" he cried, under his breath.

"Yes, I will take the tea—put nothing in it. My lips and throat are dry with fever and pain. I wish I could die instead of Geoffry! I wish he could have left a little child behind to bless me!"

Duffham, standing up while she drank the tea, thought it was well that these trials of awful pain did not fall often in a lifetime, or they would wear out alike the frame and the spirit. She grew calm again. As if ashamed of the

agitation betrayed, her manner took gradually a kind of hard composure, her face a defiant expression. She turned it on him.

"So, Mr. Duffham! It has been well done of you, to unite with Sir Geoffry in deceiving me! That child over the way has never been Colonel Layne's."

And then she went on in a style that put Duffham's back up. It was not his place to tell her, he answered. At the same time he had had no motive to keep it from her, and if she had ever put the question to him, he should readily have answered it. Unsolicited, unspoken to, of course he had held his peace. As to uniting with Sir Geoffry to deceive her, she deceived herself if she thought anything of the kind. Since the first moment they had spoken together, when the fact had become known to Sir Geoffry, never a syllable relating to it had been mentioned between them. And then, after digesting this for a few minutes in silence, she went back to Sir Geoffry's illness.

"It is just as though a blight had fallen on him," she piteously exclaimed, lifting her hand and letting it drop again. "A blight."

"Well, Lady Chavasse, I suppose something of the kind did fall upon him," was Duffham's answer.

And *that* displeased her. She turned her offended face to the doctor, and inquired what he meant by saying it.

So Duffham set himself to speak out. He had said he would, if ever the opportunity came. Reverting to what had happened some nine or more years ago, he told her that in his opinion Sir Geoffry had never recovered it: that the trouble had so fixed itself upon him as to have worked insensibly upon his bodily health.

“Self-reproach and disappointment were combined, Lady Chavasse; for there’s no doubt that the young lady was very dear to him,” concluded Duffham. “And there are some natures that cannot pick up again after such a blow.”

She was staring at Duffham with open eyes, not understanding.

“You do not mean to say that—that the disappointment about *her* has killed Sir Geoffry?”

“My goodness, no!” cried Duffham, nearly laughing. “Men are made of tougher stuff than to die of the thing called love, Lady Chavasse. What is it Shakespeare says?—‘Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.’ There is no question but that Sir Geoffry has always had an inherent tendency to delicacy of constitution,” he continued more seriously: “my partner, Layne, told me so. It was warded off for a time, and he grew into a strong, hearty man: it might perhaps have been warded off for good. But the blight—as you aptly express it, Lady Chavasse—came: and perhaps since then the spirit has not been able to maintain its own proper struggle for exis-

tence—in which lies a great deal, mind you; and now that the original weakness has shown itself again, he cannot shake it off.”

“But—according to that—he *is* dying of the blight?”

“Well—in a sense, yes. If you like to put it so.”

Her lips grew white. There rose before her mind that one hour of bitter agony in her lifetime and her son's, when he had clasped his pleading hands on hers; and told her in a voice hoarse with its bitter pain and emotion that if she decided against him he could never know happiness again in this world: that to part from one to whom he was bound by sweet endearment, by every tie that ought to bind man to woman, would be like parting with life. Entrenched in her pride, she had turned a deaf ear, and rejected his prayer: and now—there had come of it what had come. Yes, as Lady Chavasse sat there, she had the satisfaction of knowing that the work was hers.

“A warmer climate?—would it restore him?” she exclaimed, turning her hot eyes on Mr. Duffham.

“Had it been likely to do so, Lady Chavasse, I should have sent him to one long ago.”

She gathered her mantle of purple velvet about her as she got up, and went out of the room in silence, giving Duffham her hand to shake in token of friendship.

Duffham opened the front door, and was confronted by a tall footman—with a gold-headed cane and big white silk calves—who had been waiting in the air for his lady. She took the way to the Grange ; the man and his protecting cane stepping grandly after her.

“ Sir Geoffry Chavasse.”

Buried in her own reflections by the drawing-room fire, in the coming dusk of the winter's evening, Miss Layne thought her ears must have deceived her. But no. It was Sir Geoffry who advanced as the servant made the announcement ; and she rose to meet him. Strangely her heart fluttered : but she had been learning a lesson in calmness for many years ; he had too, perhaps ; and they shook hands quietly as other people do. Sir Geoffry threw back his overcoat from his wasted form as he sat down.

Wasted more than ever now. Some weeks have gone on since my lady's impromptu visit to Mr. Duffham's tea-table ; winter is merging into spring ; and the most sanguine could no longer indulge hope for Sir Geoffry.

“ You have heard how it is with me ? ” he began, looking at Mary, after getting up his short breath.

“ Yes,” she faintly answered.

“ I could not die without seeing you, Mary,

and speaking a word of farewell. It was in my mind to ask you to come to the Grange for half an hour's interview ; but I scarcely saw how to accomplish it : it might have raised some speculation. So, as the day has been fine and mild, I came to you."

" You should have come earlier," she murmured. " It is getting late and cold."

" I did come out earlier. But I have been with Duffham."

Moving his chair a little nearer to hers, he spoke to her long and earnestly. In all that was said there seemed to be a solemn meaning—as is often the case when the speaker is drawing to the confines of this world and about to enter on the next. He referred a little to the past, and there was some mutual explanation. But it seemed to be of the future that Sir Geoffry had come mostly to speak—the future of Baby Arthur.

" You will take care of him, Mary?—of his best interests?" And the tears came into Mary Layne's eyes at the words. He could not really think it necessary to ask it.

" Yes. To the very utmost of my permitted power."

" I am not able to leave him anything. You know how things are with us at the Grange. My wish would have been good——"

" It is not necessary," she interrupted. " All I have will be his, Sir Geoffry."

"*Sir* Geoffry ! Need you keep up that farce, Mary, in this our last hour ? He seems to wish to be a soldier : and I cannot think but what the profession will be as good for him as any other, provided you can *like* it for him. You will see when the time comes : all that lies in the future. Our lives have been blighted, Mary : and I pray God daily and hourly that, being so, it may have served to expiate the sin—my sin, my love, it was never yours—and that no shame may fall on him."

"I think it will not," she softly said, the painful tears dropping fast. "He will always be regarded as Colonel Layne's son : the very few who know otherwise—Mr. Duffham, Colonel and Mrs. Layne, and Lady Chavassee now—all will be true to the end."

"Ay. I believe it too. I think the boy may have a bright and honourable career before him : as much so perhaps as though he had been born my heir. I think the regret that he was not—when he so easily might have been—has latterly helped to wear me out, Mary."

"I wish you could have lived, Geoffry !" she cried from between her blinding tears.

"I have wished it also," he answered, his tone full of pain. "But it was not to be. When the days shall come that my mother is alone, save for Lady Rachel, and grieving for me, I want you to promise that you will sometimes

see her and give her consolation. Something tells me that you can do this, Mary, that she will take it from you—and I know that she will need it sadly. Be kind to her when I am gone.”

“ Yes. I promise it.”

“ You are the bravest of us all, Mary. And yet upon you has lain the greatest suffering!”

“ It is the suffering that has made me brave,” she answered. “ Oh, Geoffry, I am getting to realise the truth that it is better to have too much of suffering in this world than too little. It is a truth hard to learn : but once learnt, it brings happiness in enduring.”

Sir Geoffry nodded assent. He had learnt somewhat of it also—too late.

“ I have begun a confidential letter to Colonel Layne, Mary, and shall post it before I die. To thank him for——”

The words were drowned in a gleeful commotion—caused by the entrance of Arthur. The boy came dashing in from his afternoon’s study with the curate, some books under his arm.

“ I have not been good, Aunt Mary. He said I gave him no end of trouble ; and I’m afraid I did : but, you see, I bought the marbles going along, instead of in coming back as you told me, and—who’s that ?”

In letting his books fall on a side-table, he

had caught sight of the stranger—then standing up. The fire had burnt low, and just for the moment even the young eyes did not recognise Sir Geoffry Chavasse. Mary stirred the fire into a blaze, and drew the crimson curtains before the window.

“What have you come for?” asked the little lad, as Sir Geoffry took his hand. “Are you any better, sir?”

“I shall never be better in this world, Arthur. And so you gave your tutor trouble this afternoon!”

“Yes; I am very sorry: I told him so. It was all through the marbles. I couldn’t keep my hands out of my pockets. Just look what beauties they are!”

Out came a handful of “beauties,” of many colours. But Mary, who was standing by the mantel-piece, her face turned away; bade him put them up again. Arthur began to feel that there was some kind of hush upon the room.

“I have been talking to Miss Layne about your future—for, do you know, Arthur, you are a favourite of mine,” said Sir Geoffry. “Ever since the time when my horse knocked you down—and might have killed you—I have taken a very warm interest in your welfare. I have often wished that you—that you”—he seemed to hesitate in some emotion—“were my own little son and heir to succeed me; but of course that cannot be. I don’t know what

profession you will choose, or may be chosen for you——”

“I should like to be a soldier,” interrupted Arthur, lifting his sparkling eyes to Sir Geoffry’s.

“Your ideas may change before the time for choosing shall come. But a soldier may be as brave a servant of God as of his Queen : should you ever become a soldier, will you remember this truth ?”

“Yes,” said Arthur in a whisper, for the grave tones and manner impressed him with some awe.

Sir Geoffry was sitting down and holding Arthur before him. To the latter’s intense surprise, he saw two tears standing on the wasted cheeks. It made him feel a sort of discomfort, and he began, as a relief, to play with the chain and seal that hung on the baronet’s waistcoat. A transparent seal with a plain device on it.

“Should you like to have them when I am gone, Arthur—and wear them in remembrance of me when you are old enough ? I think it must be so : no one can have a better right to them than my little friend who once nearly lost his arm by my carelessness. I will see about it. But I have a better present than that—which I will give you now.”

Taking from his pocket the small Bible that had been his companion for some months, he

put it into Arthur's hands, telling him that he had written his name in it. And the child, turning hastily to the fly-leaf, saw it there : " Arthur Layne. From G. A. C." Lower down were the words : " Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

" Jesus said that !" cried the boy, simply.

" Jesus Christ. My Saviour and yours—for I am sure you will let Him be yours. Do not part with this Book, Arthur. Use it always : I have marked many passages in it. Should it be your fate ever to encamp on the battle-field, let the Book be with you : your guide and friend. In time you will get to love it better than any book that is to be had in the world."

The child had a tender heart, and began to cry a little. Sir Geoffry drew him nearer.

" I have prayed to God to bless you, Arthur. But you know, my child, He will only give His best blessing to those who seek it, who love and serve Him. Whatsoever may be your lot in life, strive to do your duty in it, as before God ; loving Him, loving and serving your fellow-creatures ; trusting ever to Christ's atonement. These are my last solemn words to you. Do you always remember them."

His voice faltered a little, and Arthur began to sob. " Oh, Sir Geoffry, must you die ?"

Sir Geoffry seemed to be breathing fast, as though agitation were getting too much for him.

He bent his head and kissed the boy's face fervently : his brow, his cheeks, his lips, his eyelids —there was not a spot that Sir Geoffry did not leave a kiss upon. It quite seemed as though his heart had been yearning for those kisses, and as though he could not take enough of them.

“And now, Arthur, you must do a little errand for me. Go over to Mr. Duffham, and tell him I am coming. Leave the Bible on the table here.”

Arthur went out of the house with less noise than he had entered it. Sir Geoffry rose.

“It is our turn to part now, Mary. I must be gone.”

Her sweet face was almost distorted with the efforts she had been making to keep down emotion before the child. She burst into a sobbing cry, as her hand met Sir Geoffry's.

“God bless you ! God bless you always, my darling !” he murmured. “Take my thanks, once for all, for the manner in which you have met the past ; there's not another woman living who would have done and borne as you have. This is no doubt our last meeting on earth, Mary ; but in eternity we shall be together for ever. God bless you, and love you, and keep you always !”

A lingering hand-pressure, a steady look into each other's eyes, reading the present anguish there, reading also the future trust, and then

their lips met—surely there was no wrong in it!—and a farewell kiss of pain was taken. Sir Geoffry went out, buttoning his overcoat across his chest.

A fly was waiting before Mr. Duffham's house ; the surgeon and Arthur were standing by it on the pavement. Sir Geoffry got inside.

“ Good-bye, Sir Geoffry !” cried the little lad, as Mr. Duffham, saying he should be at the Grange in the morning, was about to close the door. “ I shall write and tell papa how good you've been, to give me your own Bible. I can write small-hand now.”

“ And fine small-hand it is !” put in old Duffham in disparagement.

Sir Geoffry laid his hand gently on Arthur's head, and kept it there for a minute. His lips were moving, but he said nothing aloud. Arthur thought he had not been heard.

“ Good-bye, Sir Geoffry,” he repeated.

“ Good-bye, my child.”

Sir Geoffry lay back in an easy-chair in front of the fire in his library. The end was near at hand now, but he was bearing up quite well to the last. Lady Chavasse, worn nearly to a shadow with grief and uncertainty—for there were times yet when she actually entertained a sort of hope—sat away in the shade ; her eyes watching every

change in his countenance, her heart feeling ever its bitter repentance and despair.

Repentance? Yes, and plenty of it. For she saw too surely what might have been and what was—and knew that it was herself, herself only, who had worked out this state of things. Her self-reproach was dreadful; her days and nights were one long dream of agony. Lady Rachel was not with them very much. She lay down more than ever in her own room; and Lady Chavasse had begun to learn that this nearly continuous lying was not caused by inert idleness, but of necessity. The Grange was a sad homestead now.

The blaze from the fire flickered on Sir Geoffry's wasted face. *Hers* was kept in the shadow, or it might have betrayed the bitterness of her aching heart. He had been speaking of things that touched her conscience.

"Yes, it was a sin, mother. But it might have been repaired; and, if it had been, I believe God would have blessed us all. As it is—well, we did not repair it, you and I; and so—and so, as I take it, there has not been much of real blessing given to us here; certainly not of heartfelt comfort. I seem to see all things clearly now—if it be not wrong to say it."

Lady Chavasse saw them too — though perhaps not exactly in the way he meant. Never was the vision, of what might have been,

more vividly before her than now as he spoke. She saw him, a hale happy man ; his wife Mary, their children, a goodly flock ; all at the Grange, and herself first amidst them, reigning paramount, *rejoicing* in her good and dutiful daughter-in-law. Oh, what a contrast between that vision and reality ! A pent-up groan escaped her lips ; she coughed to smother it.

“ Mother ! ”

“ Well, Geoffry ? ”

“ You need not have suppressed my last letter to Mary—the one of explanation I wrote when I quitted her and the Grange. You might have been sure of me—that I would be true to my word to you.”

No answer. There was a great deal that she would not suppress, besides the letter, if the time had to come over again. The fire-log sparkled and crackled and threw its jets of flame upwards ; but no other noise disturbed the room’s stillness.

“ Mother ! ”

“ Well, Geoffry ? ”

“ I should like the child, little Arthur, to have my watch and its appendages. Have you any objection ? ”

“ None.”

“ It will be looked upon, you know, as a token of remembrance to the little fellow who had so sharp an illness through my horse.”

“ Yes.”

“And—I have two desks, you know. The old one of common stained wood I wish sent to Miss Layne, locked as it is. The key I will enclose in a note. Let them be sent to her when I am dead.”

“It shall be done, Geoffry.”

“There’s not much in the desk. Just a few odds and ends of papers; mementoes of the short period when I was happy—though I ought not to have been. Nothing of value; except a ring that I bought for her at Worcester at the time, and which she would not take.”

“I promise it, Geoffry. I will do all you wish.”

“Thank you. You have ever been my loving friend, mother.”

“*Ever*, Geoffry?”

“Well—you did for the best there, mother; though it was a mistake. You acted for what you thought my welfare.”

“Would you not like to see her, Geoffry?”

“I have seen her and bidden her farewell. It was the afternoon I went to Duffham’s and you said I had stayed out too late. And now I think I’ll lie down on the sofa, and get, if I can, a bit of sleep; I feel tired. To-morrow I will talk about you and Rachel—and what will be best for you both. I wish to my heart, for your sake and hers, that Rachel had borne a son; I am thinking of you both daily, and of what you will do when I am gone.”

“I shall never know pleasure in life again, Geoffry,” she cried, with a catching sob. “Life for me will be, henceforth, one of mortification and misery.”

“But it will not last for ever. O mother! how merciful God is!—to give us the blessed hope of an eternal life of perfect happiness, after all the mistakes and tribulations and disappointments of this! My darling mother! we shall all be there in sweet companionship for ever.”

They buried Sir Geoffry Chavassee by the side of his father—and anybody that likes to go there may see his tomb against the graveyard wall of Church Dykely. My Lady Chavassee arranged the funeral. The Earl of Derreston and a Major Chavassee were chief mourners, with other grand people. Duffham’s diary gives the particulars, but there’s no space here to record them. Duffham was bidden to it; and brought Arthur Layne in his hand to the Grange, in obedience to a private word of my lady’s—for she knew the dead, if he could look out of his coffin, would like to see Arthur following. So the procession started, a long line of it; the village gazing in admiration as it passed; and Dobbs the blacksmith felt as proud as ever was the Grange peacock, when he saw Colonel Layne’s little son in a coach, amidst the gentlefolks. ’Twere out of respect to the

Colonel's bravery, you might be sure, he told a select audience : and p'r'aps a bit a-cause o' that back accident to the child hisself. And so, amidst pomps, and coaches and comments, Geoffry Chavassee was left in his last home.

[*Final matters extracted from Duffham's Diary.*]

It is eighteen months now since Sir Geoffry died ; and strange changes have taken place. The world is always witnessing such : you go up, and I go down.

Admiral Chavassee came home and took possession of the Grange. My lady had previously quitted it. She did not quit Church Dykely. It seemed indifferent to her where she settled down ; and Lady Rachel Chavassee had become used to my attendance, and wished to stay. There was a small white villa to let on this side the Grange, and they took it. Lady Rachel lies down more than ever ; when she goes out it is in a Bath-chair. Old John Noah draws it. The spinal complaint is confirmed. I can do her no good ; but I go in once or twice a week, and hold a gossip. She is very fractious : and what with one thing and another, my Lady Chavassee has a trying life of it. They keep three servants only ; no carriage—save the Bath-chair. What a change ! what a change !

If ever there was a disappointed woman in this world, one who feels the humiliation of her changed position keenly, whose whole life is a long living repentance, it is Lady Chavassee. The picture of what might have been is ever in her mind ; the reality of what is, lies around her. To judge by human fallibility, she has a long existence before her : not quite fifty yet, and her health rude : but in spirit she is a bowed, broken-down woman.

The Grange is let. Sir Parker Chavassee could not reconcile himself to live in a rural district, and went back to his ship. At first he shut the Grange up ; now he has let it for a term to Mr. and Mrs. McAlpin, formerly of Calcutta. They live there with their children ; in as good style as ever the Chavassees did. Allan McAlpin has given up business, and spends his large fortune like the gentleman he is. She is Mary Layne's sister : a dainty and rather haughty woman. My lady looks out surreptitiously from a corner of her window as Mrs. McAlpin's carriage bowls along the road beyond the field. Colonel Layne's wife is also here just now, on a visit at the Grange ; her husband, Sir Richard Layne, K. C. B., has returned to his duties in India. The whole county calls upon them, and seems proud to do it, forgetting perhaps that they were but the daughters of my predecessor, Layne the apothecary. Yes ! there are strange ups and downs in this world :

and Mary Layne, so despised once, might not now be thought, even by my lady, so very unequal to Sir Geoffry Chavassee.

She does not go in for grandeur. But the village would like to lay its hands under her feet. Never was there so good, so unselfish, so sweet and humble-minded a woman as Mary. In a temporary indisposition that attacked her a few weeks ago, Mr. Dobbs, struck with consternation, gave it as his opinion that Church Dykely "could afford to lose the whole biling of 'em, better nor her." Lady Chavassee has seen her merit at last; and Mary's frequent presence in their house seems to bring light to the two lonely women. Arthur goes there too; my lady loves him, curious though the fact may sound. An incident occurred the other evening.

Miss Layne and Arthur were at tea there, when I happened to go in with some medicine. Mary had her work out, and sat talking in a low voice to Lady Rachel on her sofa; Lady Chavassee was watching Arthur, playing on the grass-plat. My lady rose up with a sudden cry:

"Take care of the wasp, Sir Arthur! Sir Arthur!"

I saw what painful reverie she had been lost in—the vision of that which might have been. It is apt to steal on her at sunset. Becoming conscious of the slip, she flushed slightly, and turned it off. Lady Rachel laughed; she thought it a good joke. Mary was more silent

than usual that night, as I walked home by her and Arthur's side.

Here ends the history. Mary Layne lives on in her home, training Arthur, helping the sick and suffering, keeping her face steadily turned to another world. Never a one is there amidst us so respected as that good, grave lady, who blighted her life in early womanhood, and who carries its trace on her sad, sweet countenance, and its never-ceasing shame on her sorrowing heart.

That's all at last. You must be glad of it. Old Duffham shall not lead me blindfold into one of his spun-out histories again. The trouble I've had to cut it down! What with the diaries and letters it was twice as long.

And he called it a tale of sin. I, Johnny Ludlow, think it is more like a tale of suffering.

II.

A DAY OF PLEASURE.

WE all liked Captain Sanker; a post-captain in the navy, ages since on half-pay; who came into Worcestershire, and brought a letter of introduction to the Squire. He was about a seventeenth cousin of the Sankers of Wales, and a twenty-seventh of Mrs. Todhetley. The captain and his wife and family, six children, had lived in Ireland and the Channel Islands, and other cheap localities, making both ends of their income meet as well as they could—and nobody needs to be told how poor is the half-pay of naval officers, and what a fight and a struggle it is to rub along. At last, through the death of a relative of Mrs. Sanker, they dropped into quite a fortune, and came over to settle at Worcester.

A Dr. Teal, who had also recently come to Worcester, and was an old friend of Captain Sanker, proposed it to them. He wrote a flaming account of the pretty place that Worcester was, of the loveliness of the surrounding country; and of the great advantage the college

school would be to the young Sankers, in giving them a free education if they could be got into it. The prospect of a free education for his boys took with the captain, and he lost no time in removing to Worcester, the Welsh Sankers giving him the introduction to us. We grew pretty intimate : calling on them when we went to Worcester for a day, and having them over to spend days with us.

All the young Sankers were got into the college school by degrees, and became four of the forty King's scholars. At that time, it is long past now, the school was not thought much of, for the boys were taught little but the classics, so entrance was easy : Latin, Greek, bad writing, and the first rule in arithmetic : there it ended. Captain Sanker thought the education first-rate, and got them all enrolled : Frederick, Daniel, King, and Toby. As to Toby, I fancy his real name was Alfred, but I never heard him called by it.

They had been in Worcester between one and two years, when Tod and I went over to them on a visit. The captain had come to spend a summer's day at Crabb Cot, and in his jolly, open-hearted fashion insisted on taking us two back. He was a short, stout man, with grey hair, and merry bright blue eyes all alight with smiles. The college school would be breaking up for its long holidays in a week or so, and it would have been better for us to have gone then ; but the captain always did things on im-

pulse, and had no more forethought than young Toby. The holidays were taken late that year, and would be very long, because the college hall, which was the schoolroom, would be wanted for the music-meeting in September.

The Sankers' was a funny household, and we pitched down amidst them without ceremony on either side. The house was at the corner of an open road, not very far from the cathedral. It was a commodious house as to size ; but all the rooms were in an everlasting litter, so that you could not get a chair to sit down in. The captain was good-humoured always, going in and out a hundred times a day. There seemed to be no fixed hours for meals, and sometimes no meals to eat : Mrs. Sanker would forget to order them. She was a little lady who went about as if she were dreaming, in a white petticoat and loose buff jacket ; or else she'd be sitting aloft in the turret, darning stockings and saying poetry. She was the least excitable person I ever knew ; all events, good and bad, she took as a matter of course : had the house caught fire she'd have looked on quietly—as Nero did when Rome was burning. Why they called the room the turret did not appear. It had a great high beam running through it on the floor : and Mrs. Sanker would sit on that, reading poetry to us or telling her dreams, her light hair all down.

At seven o'clock the boys had to be in school.

Being summer weather, that was no hardship. At nine they came in again with a rush, wild for breakfast. If Mrs. Sanker was not down to give it them, the four boys would set on and eat up the piles of bread and butter ; upon which Hetta Sanker would call them tigers, and go to the kitchen to tell the maids to cut more. Which was the cook of the two servants and which the housemaid, they did not themselves seem to know : both did the work indiscriminately. Breakfast over, the boys went out again, Tod and I with them. At ten they must be in school. At one they came home to dinner ; it might be ready, or it might not : if not, they'd go in and polish off anything cold that might be in the larder. It didn't seem to spoil their dinners. Afternoon school again until four o'clock ; and then at liberty for good. Tea was at any time ; a scrambling kind of meal that stayed on the table for hours, and was taken just as we chanced to go in for it. Jam and boiled eggs would be on the table, with the loaf and butter *ad libitum*. Sometimes toast and dripping, and there used to be a scuffle for that. As to the dinner, when Mrs. Sanker forgot it, the servants would bring in a big dish of poached eggs, and we made it up with bread and cheese. Or Dan or Toby would be sent tearing off to High Street for a lot of penny pork-pies and apple-tarts. At night we had prayers, which the captain read.

Now I daresay that to people accustomed to a domestic life like clock-work, this would have been unbearable. I thought it delightful ; as did Tod. It was like a perpetual picnic. But it was from one of these dinnerless episodes we found out that Captain Sanker had a temper. Generally speaking, he took disasters with equanimity.

It was on a Thursday. We were to have had four ducks for dinner, which the captain had bought at market the day before. Fine big ducks that he was proud of : he carried them home himself, and brought them into the parlour to show us. On this day, Thursday, Tod and I had been inside the Town Hall in the morning, listening to a trial before the magistrates—some fellow who had stolen his neighbour's clothes-props and cut them up for firewood. We got home just as the boys and their books did, as hungry as they were. There was no cloth laid, and Fred shouted out for Biddy, asking whether we were to dine to-day or to-morrow. Biddy heard, and came rushing in with the cloth and knife-tray.

“What's for dinner besides the four ducks ?” asked Dan. “Any pudding? Have you put plenty of stuffing ?”

“Indeed then, and I don't think there's much for dinner,” replied Biddy. “I've been in the turret with the missis all the morning, helping to stuff a pillow.”

She laid the cloth, and Mrs. Sanker came mooning down in the short white petticoat and buff jacket, darning a sock of Dan's. The dreadful truth came out—busy over beds and pillows, nobody had thought of dinner, and the ducks were hanging in the larder, uncooked. Before speechless tongues could find words, Captain Sanker came in, bringing his friend Dr. Teal to taste the ducks. All the Teals were as intimate at the house as we were. Years before, when the captain was a middy, Dr. Teal had been assistant-surgeon on the same ship.

“They've got a cold dinner at Teal's to-day,” said the captain to his wife, as she was shaking hands with the doctor, “so he is come to share ours. Fine ducks they are, Teal!”

Then the news had to be told. The ducks were not cooked: dinner altogether had been forgotten.

I saw Captain Sanker's face turn white—quite white; but he did not say a word. Dr. Teal—a scientific Scotchman, who walked with his nose in the air and his spectacles turned to the skies, as if always looking for a lunar rainbow—made the best of it. Laughing, he said he would come in another day, and went out.

Then it began. Captain Sanker gave vent to passion in a way that startled me, and made Tod stare. I don't believe he knew for a few moments what he was doing or saying. Nora, the other servant—both girls had come with

them from Ireland, and were as thoughtless as their mistress—came in with a dish of some hastily concocted pudding : a kind of batter. The captain, who had still his stick in his hand, lifted it, and spattered the pudding all about the cloth. Then he stamped out of the house with a bang.

“Sit down, dears,” said Mrs. Sanker, not at all moved, as she began to collect the pudding with a spoon. “Bring in the cheese, Nora, and do some eggs. Here’s a corner seat for you, Johnny ; can you squeeze in ? The captain will have his dinner with the Teals, no doubt. He has been tasting the doctor’s port wine, I think ; or he’d not have been so put up.”

And somehow we gathered, then or later, that the captain was easy as an old glove at all times and over all crosses, unless he was a little “put up” by artificial help. He told us himself one day (not, of course, alluding to anything of this) that he had had naturally an awful temper, would go into passions of absolute madness for a minute or two, when he was younger ; but that he had by much self-restraint chiefly if not quite subdued it. It was true ; and the temper never need be feared now unless he took anything to excite him. Dan had the same temper ; but without the good-nature. And they said Hetta had ; but we saw nothing of it in her. Hetta was eighteen, a nice-looking girl who was governess to little Ruth, or pretended to be ; but

Ruth would manage to escape her lessons five days in the week. It was all the same to Mrs. Sanker whether she did them or whether she didn't.

At the time of this visit of ours to Worcester, the college school was in a ferment. Between the Cathedral and St. Peter's Church was situated a poor, back district called Frog Lane. It had been re-christened Diglis Street, but was mostly called by the old name still. Crowded dwellings, narrow streets, noise and dirt—that's how the place struck me. The inhabitants were chiefly workmen belonging to the glove and china manufactories of the town. In this district was the parish school, always filled with boys, sons of the working-men, and under the superintendence of Mr. Jones, the portly parish clerk. Now, there was wont to spring up from time to time a tide of animosity between these boys and the boys of the college school. Captain Sanker said it was the fault of the college boys: had they let the St. Peter's boys alone, St. Peter's boys would never have presumed to interfere with them: but the college boys could be downright contemptuous and overbearing when they pleased. They scornfully called the St. Peter's boys the Frogs; "charity boys;" and the Frogs retorted by calling them the College Caws—after the rooks that had their homes in the old trees of the college green and kept up a perpetual cawing. The animosity generally ended in a

grand battle; and then hostilities would be dropped for months, perhaps years. One of these quarrels was going on while we were at Worcester; it had kept both schools in a ferment for some weeks, and there was every sign of a culminating fight. Of course we went in, heart and soul, with the King's scholars: but the boys on both sides held a code of honour—if you can call it so—that no stranger must take part in the engagements. The college boys were only forty, all told; the Frogs seemed to number four times as many.

Skirmishes took place daily—the scene of them being the top of Edgar Street. St. Peter's boys (let out of school at twelve, whereas the others did not get out till one) would collect in the narrow neck of their district opening on Edgar Street, and wait for the enemy. As soon as the college boys' steps were heard racing under the dark gateway of Edgar Tower, hisses and groans began. "Caw, caw, caw! Hiss, hiss, hiss! How's your Latin to-day?—what birchings has you had? Calls yourselves gents does you, you College Caws? You daredn't come on fair, and fight it out with us, you Caws. Caw, caw, caw!" Sometimes the college boys would pass on, only calling back their contemptuous retorts; sometimes they'd halt, and a fierce storm of abuse would be interchanged, to the edification of Edgar Street in general and the clerks in Mr. Clifton's Registry Office,

“ You beggarly Frogs ! We don’t care to soil our hands with you ! Had you been gentlemen, we’d have polished you off long ago, and sent you into next week. Croak, Frogs ! Croak ! ” Not a third of the college boys need have taken Edgar Tower on their way home ; through the cloisters and out by St. Michael’s churchyard would have been their direct way ; but they chose to meet the Frogs. Once in a way there’d be a single combat ; but as a rule nothing came of it but the abuse. When that was exhausted, each lot would rush home their separate ways : the Frogs back down Frog Lane ; the others up the steps, or onwards down Edgar Street, as their road might lie, and remain apart till the same hour next day.

I have not said much yet about King Sanker. He was lame : something was wrong with his knee. Gatherings would come in it, and then he’d be in bed for weeks together. He was nearly thirteen then ; next to Dan : and Dan was over fourteen. King was a nice little fellow, with mild eyes as blue as the captain’s : Fred would order him to keep “ out of the ruck ” in the skirmishes with the Frogs, and he mostly did. If it came to a fight, you see, King might have been hurt ; he had no fighting in him, was frightened at it, and he could not run much. King was just like his mother in ideas : he would tell us his dreams as she did, and recite pieces of poetry a mile long. Dan and

King slept together in the room next to ours ; it was in the garret, close to the turret-room. King would keep us awake singing ; sometimes chants, sometimes hymns, sometimes songs. They'd have let him try for the choir, but the head-master of the college school thought his knee would not do for it.

It was Saturday, and a pouring wet afternoon. Our visit was drawing to an end : on the following Wednesday we should bid the Sankers good-bye. Captain Sanker, always trying to find out ways of making folks happy, had devised a day of pleasure for the last day of our stay, Tuesday. We were to go to Malvern ; a whole lot of us : ourselves, and the Teals, and the Squire, and Mrs. Todhetley, and eat our dinner on the hill. It was so settled ; and the arrangements were planned and made.

But this was yet but Saturday. We dined at twelve : whether for anybody's convenience or that the servants made a mistake in an hour, I don't remember. It happened to be a saint's day, so the boys had no school ; and, being wet, came home after morning service in the Cathedral. After a jolly dinner of peas and bacon and pancakes, we looked at the skies for a bit, and then (all but Fred and Hetta) went up to the turret-room. Dan said the rain had come to spite us ; for the whole school had meant to race to Berwick's Bridge after afternoon service and hold a mock review in the fields there. It

was coming down in torrents, peppering the roof and the windows. Mrs. Sanker sat in the middle of the old beam, mending one of Toby's shirts, "Lalla Rookh" open on her knee, out of which she was singing softly; the floor was strewn with patches, and scissors, and tapes, and the combs were out of one side of her hair.

"Read it out loud to us, mamma," cried King.

"I can't spare time to read, King," she said. "Look here"—holding out the work, all rags and tatters. "If I don't mend this, Toby won't have a shirt to put on to-morrow."

"I shan't mind about that," said Toby.

"Oh, but, dear, I don't think you could go without a shirt. Has anybody seen my cotton?"

"Then say over something to us that you know, mamma," returned King, as Toby found the cotton.

"Very well. I can do that, and work too. Sit down all of you."

We sat down, King and Toby on the floor before her, the rest of us on the beam on either side her. Dan, who did not care for poetry, got some Brazil nuts out of his pocket and cracked them while he listened.

Mrs. Sanker might as well have read "Lalla Rookh." She began to recite "The Friar of Orders Grey." But what with gazing up at the sky through the rain to give it due emphasis, and shaking her head at pathetic parts, the

sewing did not get on. She had finished the verse—

“ Weep no more, lady, weep no more,
Thy sorrow is in vain ;
For violets, plucked, the sweetest showers
Will ne’er make grow again,”

when King surprised us by bursting into tears. But as Mrs. Sanker took no notice, I supposed it was nothing unusual.

“ You young donkey !” cried Dan, when the poem was finished. “ You’ll never be a man, King.”

“ It is such a nice verse, Dan,” replied young King, meekly. “ I whisper it over sometimes to myself in bed. Mamma, won’t you say the ‘ Barber’s Ghost ’ ? Johnny Ludlow would like to hear that, I know.”

We had the “ Barber’s Ghost,” which was humorous, and we had other things. After that, Mrs. Sanker told a dreadful story about a real ghost, one that she said haunted her family, and another of a murder that was discovered by a dream. Some of the young Sankers were the oddest mixtures of timidity and bravery—personally brave in fighting ; frightfully timid as to being alone in the dark—and I no longer wondered at it if she had brought them up on these ghostly dishes.

“ I should not like to have dreams that would tell me of murders,” said King, thoughtfully. “ But I do dream very strange dreams some-

times. When I awake, I lie and wonder what they mean. Once I dreamt I saw Heaven—didn't I, mamma? It was so beautiful."

"Ay; my family have always been dreamers," replied Mrs. Sanker.

Thus, what with ghosts and poetry and talking, the afternoon wore on unconsciously. Dan suddenly started up with a shout:

"By Jove!"

The sun had come out. Come out, and we had never noticed it. It was shining as brightly as could be on the slates of all the houses. The rain had ceased.

"I say, we shall have the review yet!" cried Dan. "And, by Jupiter, that's the college bell! Make a rush, you fellows, or you'll be marked late. There's three o'clock striking."

The King's scholars thought it a great shame that they should have to attend prayers in the Cathedral morning and afternoon on saints' days, instead of wholly benefiting by the holiday. They had to do it, however. The three went flying out towards the Cathedral, and I gave King my arm to help him after them. Tod and I—intending to take part in the review at Berwick's Bridge—went to college also, and sat behind the surpliced King's scholars on the decani side, in the stalls next to the chanter.

But for a bit of mud, you'd hardly have thought there had been any rain when we got out again; and the sun was glowing in the blue

sky. Not a single fellow was absent : even King limped along. We took the way by the Severn, past the boat-house at the end of the college boundaries, and went leisurely along the towing-path, intending to get into the fields beyond Diglis Wharf, and so onwards.

I don't believe there was a thought in anybody's mind that afternoon of the enemy. The talk—and a good hub-bub it was—turned wholly upon soldiers and reviews. A regular review of the Worcestershire militia took place once a year on Kempsey Ham, and some of the boys' heads got a trifle turned with it. They were envying Lord Ward, now, as they went along ; saying they should like to be him, and look as well as he did, and sit his horse as proudly.

“Of course he's proud,” squeaked out the biggest Teal, whose voice was uncertain. “Think of his money!—and his horses!—and see how good-looking he is ! If Lord Ward has not a right to be proud, I'd like to know who has. Why, he—oh, by George ! I say, look here !”

Turning into the first field, we found we had turned into a company of Frogs. All the whole lot, it seemed. Caws and Croaks and hoots and groans from either side rose at once on the air. Which army commenced the hostilities, I couldn't tell ; the one was as eager for it as the other ; and in two minutes the battle had begun—begun in earnest. Up dashed the senior boy.

“Look here,” said he to me and Tod ; “you

understand our rules. You must neither of you attempt to meddle in this. Stay and look on if you please ; but keep at a sufficient distance where it may be seen that you are simply spectators. These beggars shan't have it to say that we were helped."

He dashed back again. Tod ground his teeth with the effort it took to keep himself from going in to pummel some of the Frogs. Being upon honour, he had to refrain; and he did it somehow.

The Frogs had the blazing sun in their eyes; our side had it at their backs—which was against the Frogs. There were no weapons of any sort ; only arms and hands. It looked like the scrimmage of an Irish row. Sometimes there was closing-in, and fighting hand to hand, head to head ; sometimes the forces were drawn back again, each to its respective ground. During the first of these interludes, just as the sides were preparing to charge, a big Frog, with broad, awkward shoulders, a red, rugged face, and a bleeding nose, came dashing forward alone into the ranks of the college boys, caught up poor lame helpless King Sanker, bore him bravely right through, and put him down in safety beyond, in spite of the blows freely showered upon him. Not a soul on our side had thought of King ; and the college boys were too excited to see what the big Frog was about, or they'd perhaps have granted him grace to pass unmolested. King sat down on the wet grass

for a bit, and gazed about him like a chap bewildered. Seeing me and Tod, he came limping round to us.

"It was good-natured of that big Frog, wasn't it, Johnny Ludlow?"

"Very. He'd make a brave soldier. I mean a real soldier."

"Perhaps I should have been killed, but for him. I was frightened, you see; and there was no way out. I couldn't have kept on my legs a minute longer."

The battle raged. The cawing and the croaking, that had been kept up like an array of trumpets, fell off as the fighting waxed hotter. The work grew too fierce and real for tongue abuse. We could hear the blows dealt on the upturned faces. King, who had a natural horror of fighting, trembled inwardly from head to foot, and hid his face behind me. Tod was dancing with excitement, flinging his closed fists outward in imaginary battle, and roaring out like a dragon.

I can't say who would have won had they been left alone. Probably the Frogs, for there were a great many more of them. But on the other hand, none of them were so old as some of the college boys. When the fight was at the thickest, we heard a sudden shout from a bass, gruff, authoritative voice: "Now then, boys, how dare you!" and saw a big, portly gentleman in black clothes and a white necktie, appear behind the Frogs, with a stout stick in his hand.

It was Clerk Jones, their master. His presence and his voice acted like magic. Not a Frog of them all but dropped his blows and his rage. The college boys had to drop theirs, as the enemy receded. Clerk Jones put himself between the two lots of combatants.

The way he went on at both sides was something good to hear. Shaking his stick at his own boys, they turned tail softly, and then rushed away through the mud like wild horses, not waiting to hear the close: so the college boys got the pepper intended for the lot. He vowed and declared by the stick that was in his hand—and he had the greatest mind, he interrupted himself to say, to put it about *their* backs—that if ever they molested his boys again, or another quarrel was got up, he would appeal publicly to the dean and chapter. If one of the college boys made a move in future to so much as cast an insulting look towards a boy in St. Peter's school, that boy should go before the dean; and it would not be his fault (the clerk's) if he was not expelled the Cathedral. *He* would take care, and precious good care, that his boys should preserve civility henceforth; and it was no great favour to expect that the college boys would. For his part, he should feel ashamed in their places to oppress lads in an inferior class of life to themselves; and he should make it his business before he slept to see the head-master of the college school, and report this present

disgraceful scene to him : the head-master could deal with it as he pleased.

Mr. Jones went off, flourishing his stick ; and our side began to sum up its damages : closed eyes, scratched faces, swollen noses, and torn clothes. Dan Sanker's nose was as big as a beer barrel, and his shirt-front hung in ribbons. Fred's eyes were black. Toby's jacket had a sleeve slit up, and one of his boots had disappeared for good.

The spectacle we made, going home down the Gloucester Road, could not be easily forgotten. Folks collected on the pavement, and came to the windows and doors to see the sight. It was like an army of soldiers returning from battle. Bleeding faces, green eyes, clothes tattered and bespattered with mud. Farmers going back from market drew up their gigs to the roadside, to stare at us while we passed. One little girl, in a pony-chaise, wedged between a fat old lady in a red shawl, and a gentleman in top boots, was frightened nearly into fits. She shrieked and cried, till you might have heard her up at Mr. Allies's ; and the old lady could not pacify her. The captain was out when we got in : and Mrs. Sanker took it with all with her usual apathy, only saying we had better have come straight home from college to hear some more poetry.

An awful fuss was made by the head-master. Especially as the boys had to appear on Sunday

at the Cathedral services. Damages were visible on many of them ; and their white surplices only served to show the faces off the more. The chorister who took the solo in the afternoon anthem was decorated with cuttings of sticking plaster ; he looked like a tattooed young Indian.

The school broke up on the Monday : and on that day Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley drove into Worcester, and put up at the Star and Garter. They came to us in the afternoon, as had been agreed upon ; dinner being ordered by Captain Sanker for five o'clock. It was rather a profuse dinner ; fish and meat and pies and dessert, but quite a scramble of confusion : which none of the Sankers seemed to notice or to mind.

“ Johnny dear, is it *always* like this ? ” Mrs. Todhetley could not help asking me, in a whisper. “ I should be in a lunatic asylum in a week.”

We started for Malvern on Tuesday at eleven o'clock. The Squire drove Bob and Blister in his high carriage : Dr. Teal, Captain Sanker, and Fred sitting with him. There was no railroad then. The ladies and the girls crammed themselves into a post-carriage from the Star, and a big waggonette was lent by some friend of Dr. Teal for the rest. The boys were losing the signs of their damages ; nothing being very conspicuous now but Dan's nose. It refused to go down at all in size, and in colour was brighter

than a rainbow. The Teals kept laughing at it, which made Dan savage; once he burst out in a passion, wishing all the Frogs were shot.

I remember that drive still. John Teal and I sat on the box of the post-carriage, the post-boy riding his horses. I remember the different features of the road as we passed them—not but that I knew them well before; I remember the laden orchards, and the sweet scent of the bean fields, in flower then. Over the bridge from Worcester went we, up the New Road and through St. John's, and then into the open country; past Lower Wick, where Mrs. Sherwood lived, and on to Powick across its bridge. I remember that a hearse and three mourning coaches stood before the Lion, the men refreshing themselves with drink; and we wondered who was being buried that day. Down that steep and awkward hill next, where so many accidents occurred before it was altered, and so on to the Link; the glorious hills always before us from the turning where they had first burst into view; their clumps of gorse and broom, their paths and their sheep-tracks growing gradually plainer to the sight the nearer we drew. The light and the shade cast by the sun swept over them perpetually, a landscape ever changing; the white houses of the village, nestling amid their dark foliage, looked fair for the eye to rest upon. Youth, as we all get to learn when it has gone by, lends a charm that later

life cannot know : but never a scene that I have seen since, abroad or at home, lies on my memory with half the beauty as does that old approach to Malvern. Turning round to the left at the top of the Link, we drove into Great Malvern.

The carriages were left at the Crown. An old pony was chartered for some of the provisions, and we boys carried the rest. The people at St. Ann's Well had been written to, and the room behind the well was in readiness for us. Once the baskets were deposited there, we were at liberty till dinner-time, and went on up the hill. Turning a corner which had hidden the upper landscape from view, we came upon Dan Sanker, who had got on first. He was standing to confront us, his face big with excitement, his nose all afire.

"If you'll believe me, those cursed Frogs are here!"

In resentful consternation—for the Frogs seemed to have no business to be at Malvern—we rushed on, turned another corner, and so brought ourselves into a wide expanse of upper prospect. Sure enough! About a hundred of the Frogs in their Sunday clothes were trooping down the hill. They had got the start of us in arriving at Malvern, and had been to the top already.

"I'll—be—jiggered!" cried Dan, savagely. "What a horrid lot they are! Look at their

sneaking tail-coats. Wouldn't I like to pitch into them!"

The college school wore the Eton jacket. Those preposterous coats, the tails docked to the size of the boys, did not improve the appearance of the Frogs. But as to pitching-in, Dan did not dare to do it after what had passed. It was his nose that made him so resentful.

"I desire that you will behave as gentlemen," said Captain Sanker, who was behind with the Squire, and bid us halt. "Those poor boys are here, I see; but they will not, I am sure, molest you, neither must you molest them. Civility costs nothing, remember. What are you looking so cross for, Dan?"

"Oh, well, papa, it's like their impudence, to come here to-day!" muttered Dan.

The captain laughed. "They may say it's like yours, to come, Dan: they were here first. Go on, lads, and don't forget yourselves."

Tod's whistle below was heard just then; and Dan, not caring to show his nose to the enemy, responded, and galloped back. We went on. The paths there are narrow, you know, and we looked to have all the string of Frogs sweeping past us, their coats brushing our jackets. But—perhaps not caring to meet us any more than we cared to meet them—most of them broke off on a detour down the steep of the hill, and so avoided us. About half-a-dozen came on. One of them was a big-shouldered, awkward, red-faced

boy, taller than the rest of them and not unlike a real frog ; he walked with his cap in his hand, and his brown hair stood on end like a porcupine's. Indisputably ugly was he, with a mouth as wide as a frying-pan ; but it was a pleasant and honest face, for all that. King suddenly darted to him as he was passing, and pulled him towards Captain Sanker, in excitement.

" Papa, this is the one I told you of ; the one who saved me and didn't mind the blows he got in doing it. I should have been knocked down, and my knee trampled on, but for him."

Out went Captain Sanker's hand to shake the boy's. He did it heartily. As to the Frog, he blushed redder than before with modesty.

" You are a brave lad, and I thank you heartily," said the captain, wringing his hand as though he'd wring it off. " You do honour to yourself, whoever you may be. There was not one of his own companions to think of him, and save him, and you did it in the midst of dangers. Thank you, my lad."

The captain slid half-a-crown into his hand, telling him to get some Malvern cakes. The boy stood back for us to go by. I was the last, and he spoke as if he knew me.

" Good-day, Master Johnny."

Why, who was he ?—And, now I came to look at his freckled face, it seemed quite familiar. His great wide mouth brought me remembrance.

“Why it’s Mark Ferrar! I didn’t know you at first, Mark.”

“We’ve come over here for the day in two vans,” said Mark, putting his grey cap on. “Eighty of the biggest of us; the rest are to come to-morrow. Some gent that’s visiting at St. Peter’s parsonage has gave us the treat, sir.”

“All right, Mark. I’m glad you thought of King Sanker on Saturday.”

Ferrar touched his cap, and went vaulting down after his comrades. He was related to Daniel Ferrar, the Squire’s bailiff, of whom you have heard before, poor fellow, and also to the Batleys of South Crabb. He used to come over to Crabb, that’s where I had seen him.

Some donkeys came running down the hill, their white cloths flying. Captain Sanker stopped one and put King on him—for King was tired already. We soon got to the top then, and to Lady Harcourt’s Tower. Oh it was a glorious day! The great wide prospect around shone out in all its beauty. The vale of Herefordshire on the one side with its rural plains and woods basked in the sunshine, its crops of ruddy pears and apples giving token of the perry and cider to come; on the other side rose the more diversified landscape that has been so much told and talked of. Over the green meadows and the ripening corn-fields lay Worcester itself: the Cathedral showing out well, and the summit of the high church-

spire of St. Andrew's catching a glint of the sunlight. Hills caught the eye wherever it turned : Bredon Hill, Abberleigh Hills, the Old Hills ; homesteads lay amid their lands, half hidden by their rick-yards and their clustering trees ; cattle and sheep browsed on the grass or lay in the shade to shelter themselves from the mid-day sun. To the right, on the verge of the horizon, far, far away, might be caught a glimpse of something that sparkled like a bed of stars—the Bristol Channel. It is not often you can discern that from Malvern, but this day that I am telling of was one of the clearest ever seen there ; the atmosphere looking quite rarefied in spite of the sunlight.

King's donkey regaled himself with morsels of herbage, the donkey-boy lay stretched beside him, and we boys raced about. When an hour or two had passed, and we were hotter than fire and more hungry than hunters, we bethought ourselves of dinner. King got on his donkey again, and the rest of us whipped him up. When half-way down we saw Dr. Teal gesticulating and shouting, telling us to come on and not keep dinner waiting longer.

We had it in the room behind the well. It was a squeeze to sit round the table. Cold meats, and salad, and pastry, and all sorts of good things. Dan was next to me ; he said he could hardly eat for thirst, and kept drinking away at the bottled ale.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Todhetley to him by-and-by, “don’t you think you had better drink some water instead—or lemonade? This bottled ale is very strong.”

“I am afraid it is,” said Dan. “I’ll go in for the tarts now.”

The room was stuffy; and after dinner a table was carried out to a sheltered place near the well: not much better than a little ledge of a path, but where we could not be overlooked, and should be quite out of the way of the hill-climbers. The bank rose perpendicularly above us, banks descended beneath to goodness knew where; there we sat at dessert, all sheltered. I think dark trees and shrubs overshadowed us; but I am not altogether sure.

How it came about, I hardly know: but something was brought up about King’s store of ballads, and he was asked to give us his favourite one, “Lord Bateman,” for the benefit of the company. He turned very shy, but Captain Sanker told him not to be silly: and after going white and red for a bit, he began. Perhaps the reader would like to hear it. I never repeat it to myself, no, nor even a verse of it, but poor King Sanker comes before me just as I saw him that day, his back to the ravine below, his eyes looking at nothing, his thin hands nervously twisting some paper about that had covered the basket of raspberries.

Lord Bateman was a noble lord,
A noble lord of high degree :
He shipped himself on board a ship ;
Some foreign country he would see.

He sailèd east, he sailèd west,
Until he came unto Turkey,
Where he was taken, and put in prison,
Until his life was quite weary.

In this prison there grew a tree ;
It grew so very stout and strong :
And he was chainèd by the middle
Until his life was almost gone.

The Turk, he had one only daughter,
The fairest creature eye e'er did see :
She stole the keys of her father's prison,
And said she'd set Lord Bateman free.

"Have you got houses?—have you got lands?—
Or does Northumberland belong to thee?
And what would you give to the fair young lady
Who out of prison would set you free?"

"Oh, I've got houses, and I've got lands,
And half Northumberland belongs to me ;
And I'd give it all to the fair young lady
That out of prison would set me free."

Then she took him to her father's palace,
And gave to him the best of wine ;
And every health that she drank to him
Was "I wish, Lord Bateman, you were mine.

"For seven long years I'll make a vow ;
And seven long years I'll keep it strong :
If you will wed no other woman,
I will wed no other man."

Then she took him to her father's harbour,
And gave to him a ship of fame :
"Farewell, farewell to you, Lord Bateman ;
I fear I never shall see you again."

When seven long years were gone and past,
And fourteen days, well known to me ;
She packed up her gay gold and clothing,
And said Lord Bateman she would see.

When she came to Lord Bateman's castle,
So boldly there she rang the bell :
"Who's there, who's there," cried the young proud porter ;
"Who's there, who's there unto me tell ?"

"Oh, is this Lord Bateman's castle ?
And is his lordship here within ?"
"Oh yes, oh yes," cried the young proud porter :
"He has just now taken his young bride in."

"Tell him to send me a slice of cake,
And a bottle of the best of wine ;
And not to forget the fair young lady
That did release him when close confined."

Away, away went this young proud porter,
Away, away, away went he ;
Until he came unto Lord Bateman,
When on his bended knees fell he.

"What news, what news, my young porter ;
What news, what news have you brought unto me ?"
"Oh, there is the fairest of all young ladies
That ever my two eyes did see.

"She has got rings on every finger,
And on one of them she has got three ;
And she has as much gold round her middle
As would buy Northumberland of thee.

"She tells you to send her a slice of cake,
And a bottle of the best of wine ;
And not to forget the fair young lady
That did release you when close confined."

Lord Bateman in a passion flew ;
He broke his sword in splinters three ;
"I'll give all my father's wealth and riches
Now if Sophia has crossed the sea."

Then up spoke his young bride's mother—
Who never was heard to speak so free :
"Don't you forget my only daughter,
Although Sophia has crossed the sea."

“ I own I’ve made a bride of your daughter :
She’s none the better nor worse for me :
She came to me on a horse and saddle,
And she may go back in a carriage and three.”

Then another marriage was prepared,
With both their hearts so full of glee :
“ I’ll range no more to foreign countries
Since my Sophia has crossed the sea.”

King stopped, just as shyly as he had begun. Some laughed, others applauded him ; and the Squire told us that the first time he had ever heard “ Lord Bateman ” was in Scouton’s show, on Worcester race-course, many a year ago.

After that, we broke up. I and some of the boys climbed up straight to Lady Harcourt’s Tower again. A few Frogs were about the hills, but they did not come in contact with us. When we got back to St. Ann’s the tea was ready in the room.

“ And I wish to goodness they’d have it,” cried Dan, “ for I’m as thirsty as a fish. I’ve been asleep out there all the while on the bench in the sun. Can’t we have tea, mother ? ”

“ As soon as ever the gentlemen come back,” spoke up Mrs. Teal, who seemed to like order. “ They went down to look at the Abbey.”

They were coming up then, puffing over the walk ; Tod and Fred Sanker with them. We sat down to tea ; and it was half over when the two young Sankers, King and Toby, were missed.

“ Tiresome monkeys ! ” cried the captain. “ I never came over here with a party yet, but we

had to spend the last hour or two hunting some of them up. Well, I'll not bother myself over it : they shall find their way home as they can."

Toby ran in presently. He had only been about the hills he said, and had not seen King.

"I dare say King's still in the place where we had dessert," said Hetta Sanker, just then thinking of it. "He stayed behind us all, saying he was tired. You boys can go and see."

I and Jim Teal ran off together. King was not there. One of the women at the well said that when she went out for the chairs and things, just before tea-time, nobody was there.

"Oh, he'll turn up presently," said the captain. And we went on with our tea, and forgot him.

It was twilight when we got down to the village to start for home. The Squire set off first : the same party with him as in the morning, except that Mrs. Teal took her husband's place. When they were bringing out the post-carriage, King was again thought of.

"He has stayed somewhere singing to himself," said Mrs. Sanker.

We went off in different directions, shouting our throats hoarse. Up as far as St. Ann's, and along the hill underneath, and in all the corners of the village : no King. It was getting strange.

"I should hope none of those impudent Frogs have made off with him !" cried Toby Sanker.

"They are capable of anything, mind you," added Dan.

One vanload of Frogs had started ; the other was getting ready to start. The boys, gaping and listening about, saw and heard all our consternation at the dilemma we were in. Mrs. Todhetley, who did not understand the state of social politics, as between them and the college school, turned and inquired whether they had seen King.

“ A delicate lad, who walks lame,” she explained. “ We think he must have fallen asleep somewhere on the hill : and we cannot start without him.”

The Frogs showed themselves good-natured ; and went tearing up towards the hill to look for King. In passing the Unicorn, a pleasure-party of young men and women, carrying their empty provision-baskets, came running downwards, saying that they had heard groaning under a part of the hill—and described where. I seemed to catch the right place, as if by instinct, and was up there first. King was lying there ; not groaning then, but senseless or dead.

Looking upwards to note the position, we thought he must have fallen down from the place where we had sat at dessert. Hetta Sanker said she had left him there by himself, to rest.

“ He must have dropped asleep, and fallen down,” cried Dr. Teal.

King came to as they lifted him, and walked a few steps ; but looked around and fell aside

as though his head were dazed. Dr. Teal thought there was not much the matter, and that he might be conveyed to Worcester. Ferrar helped to carry him down the hill, and the other Frogs followed. A fine fury their van driver was in, at their having kept him waiting!

King was made comfortable along the floor of the waggonette, upon some rugs and blankets lent by the Crown; and so was taken home. When Captain Sanker found what had happened, he grew excited, and went knocking at half the doctors' doors in Worcester. Mr. Woodward was the first in, and Dr. Malden and Mr. Carden came running together. By what the captain had said, they expected to find all the house dead.

King seemed better in the morning. The injury lay chiefly in his head. We did not hear what the doctors made of it. He was sensible, and talked a little. When asked how he came to fall, all he said was that he "went over and could not save himself."

Coming in, from carrying the news, of how he was, to the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley at the Star, I found Mark Ferrar at the door.

"Mr. Johnny," said he, in a low voice, his plain face all concern, "how did it happen? Sure he was not pushed over?"

"Of course not. Why do you ask it?"

Ferrar paused. "Master Johnny, when boys

are lame, they are more cautious. He'd hardly be likely to slip."

"He might in waking. It's only a narrow ledge there. And his sister says she thinks he went to sleep when she left him. She was the last that saw him."

Mark's wide mouth went into all sorts of contortions, and the freckles shone in the sun in his effort to get the next words out.

"I fancy it was me that saw him last, Master Johnny. Leastways, later than his sister."

"Did you? How was that?"

"He must have seen me near the place, and he called to me. There was nobody there but him, and some chairs and a table and glasses and things. He asked me to sit down, and began telling me he had been saying 'Lord Bateman' to them all. I didn't know what 'Lord Bateman' meant, Master Johnny—and he said he would tell it me; he should not mind then, but he had minded saying it to the company. It was poetry, I found; but he stopped in the middle, and told me to go then, for he saw some of them coming——"

"Some of what?" I interrupted.

"Well, I took it to mean some of his grown-up party, or else the college boys. Anyway, he seemed to want me gone, sir, and I went off at once. I didn't see him after that."

"He must have fallen asleep, and somehow slipped over."

"Yes, sir. What a pity he was left in that shallow place!"

King seemed to have all his wits about him, but his face had a white, odd look in it. He lay in a room on the first floor, that belonged in general to the two girls. When I said Mark Ferrar was outside, King asked me to take him up. But I did not like taking him without speaking to Captain Sanker; and I went to him in the parlour.

"The idea of a Frog coming into our house!" cried resentful Dan, as he heard me. "It's like his impudence to stop outside it! What next? Let him wait till King's well."

"You hold your tongue, Dan," cried the captain. "The boy shall go up, whether he's a Frog or whether he's one of you. Take him up, Johnny."

He did not look unlike a frog when he got into the room, with his wide, red, freckled face and his great wide mouth—but, as I have said, it was a face to be trusted. The first thing he did, looking at King, was to burst into a great blubber of tears.

"I hope you'll get well," said he.

"I might have been as bad as this in the fight, but for your pulling me out of it, Frog," said King, in his faint voice. And he did not call him Frog in any contempt, but as though it were his name: he knew him by no other. "Was that bump done in the battle?"

Mark had his cap off: on one side of his forehead, under the hair, we saw a big lump the size of an egg. "Yes," he answered, "it was got in the fight. Father thinks it never means to go down. It's pretty stiff and sore yet."

King sighed. He was gazing up at the lump with his nice blue eyes.

"I don't think there'll be any fighting in Heaven," said King. "And I wrote out 'Lord Bateman' the other day, and they shall give it you to keep. I didn't finish telling it you. He owned half Northumberland; and he married her after all. She had set him free from the prison, you know, Frog."

"Yes," replied Frog, quite bewildered, and looking as though he could not make top or tail of the story. "I hope you'll get well, sir. How came you to fall?"

"I don't think they expect me to get well: they'd not have so many doctors if they did. I shan't be lame, Frog, up there."

"Did you slip?—or did anybody push you?" went on Frog, lowering his voice.

"Hush!" said King, glancing at the door. "If papa heard you say that, he might go into a passion."

"But—was it a slip—or were you pushed over?" persisted Frog.

"My leg is always slipping: it has never been of much good to me," answered King. "When you come up there, and see me with a

beautiful strong body and straight limbs, you won't know me again at first. Good-bye till then, Frog; good-bye. It was very kind of you to carry me out of the fight, and God saw you."

"Good-bye, sir," said Frog, with another burst, as he put out his hand to meet poor King's white one. "Perhaps you'll get over it yet."

Tod and I took leave of them in the afternoon, and went up to the Star. The Squire wanted to be home early. The carriage was waiting before the gateway, the ostler holding the heads of Bob and Blister, when Captain Sanker came up in dreadful excitement.

"He's gone," he exclaimed. "My poor King's gone. He died as the clock was striking four."

And we had supposed King to be going on well! The Squire ordered the horses to be put up again, and we went down to the house. The boys and girls were all crying.

King lay stretched on the bed, his face very peaceful and looking less white than I had sometimes seen it look in life. On the cheeks there lingered a faint colour; his forehead felt warm; you could hardly believe he was dead.

"He has gone to the Heaven he talked of," said Mrs. Sanker through her tears. "He has been talking about it at intervals all day—and now he is there; and has his harp amid the angels."

And that was the result of our Day of Pleasure! The force of those solemn words has rarely been brought home to hearts as it was to ours then : “ In the midst of life we are in death.”

III.

THE FINAL ENDING TO IT.

OF all the gloomy houses anybody ever stayed in, Captain Sanker's was the worst. Nothing but coffins coming into it, and all of us stealing about on tip-toe. King lay in the room where he died. There was to be an inquest : at which the captain was angry. But he was so excited and sorrowful just then as to have no head at all.

Which might well be excused in him. Picture what it was ! Three carriages full of us had started on the Tuesday morning, expecting to have a day of charming pleasure on the Malvern Hills in the July sunshine ; no more thinking of death or any other catastrophe, than if the world had never contained such ! And poor King—poor lame King, whose weakness made him more helpless than were we strong ones, and who only on the previous Saturday had been plucked out of the fight in Diglis Meadow and been saved—King must fall asleep on a dangerous part of the hill and roll down it

and come home to die! "Better King than any of the rest of you," cried Mrs. Sanker, more than once, in her dreamy way, and with her eyes dry, for she seemed tired of tears: "he could never have done battle with the world as you will have to do it; and he was quite ready for heaven."

Instead of going home with our people the day after the death, as Tod did, I had to wait at Worcester for the inquest. When the beadle (or whoever the officer might be; he had gold cord on his hat and white ribbed stockings below his breeches: which stockings might have been fellows to old Jones's of Church Dykely) came to Captain Sanker's to make inquiries the night of the death, and heard that I had been first up with King after his fall, he said I should have to give evidence. So I stayed on with them—much to my uneasiness.

If I had thought the Sankers queer people before, I thought them queerer now. Not one of the boys and girls, except Fred, cared to go alone by the door of the room where King lay. And, talking of King, it was not until I saw the name on the coffin-lid that I knew his name was not King, but Kingsley. He looked as nice and peaceful as any dead lad with a nice face could look; and yet they were afraid to pass by outside. Dan and Ruth were the worst. I did not wonder at her—she was a little girl; but I did at Dan. Fred told me that

when they were children a servant had used to tell them stories of ghosts and dreams and banshees; Hetta and he were too old to be frightened, but the rest had taken it all into their nature. I privately thought that Mrs. Sanker was no better than the fool of a servant, reciting to them her dreams and accounts of apparitions.

King died on the Wednesday afternoon. On Thursday afternoon the inquest took place. It was held at the Angel Inn, in Sidbury, and Mr. Robert Allies was the foreman. Boys don't give evidence on inquests every day: I felt shy and uncomfortable at having to do it; and perhaps that may be the reason why the particulars remain so strongly on my memory. The time fixed was three o'clock, but it was nearly four when they came down to look at King: the coroner explained to the jury that he had been detained. When they went back to the Angel Inn we followed them—Captain Sanker, Fred, and I.

All kinds of nonsense ran about the town. It was reported that there had been a fight with the Frogs on Malvern Hill, during which King had been pitched over. This was only laughed at by those who knew how foundationless it was. Not a shadow of cause existed for supposing it to have been anything but a pure accident.

The coroner and jury sat at a long table covered with green baize. The coroner had his clerk by him; and on one side Mr. Allies sat

Captain Chamberlain, on the other side Mr. Allcroft. Dr. Teal and Mr. Woodward were present, and gave the medical evidence in a most learned manner. Reduced to plainness, it meant that King had died of an injury to the head.

When my turn came, what they chiefly asked me was, whether I had seen or heard any quarrelling with St. Peter's boys that day at Malvern. None whatever, I answered. Was I quite sure of that? pursued one—it was Mr. Allcroft. I did not think there had been, or could have been, I repeated: we and the charity boys had kept apart from each other all day. Then another of the jury, Mr. Stone, put some questions, and then Mr. Allen—I thought they were never going to believe me. So I said it was the contrary of quarrelling, and told of Captain Sanker's giving one of them half-a-crown because he had been kind to King on Saturday, and of some of the boys—all who had not gone home in the first van—having helped us to look for King at night. After they had turned me inside out, the coroner could say that these questions were merely put for form's sake and for the satisfaction of the public.

When the witnesses were done with, the coroner spoke to the jury. I suppose it was his charge. It seemed all as plain as a turnpike, he said: the poor little lame boy had slipped and fallen. The probability was that he had dropped asleep too near the edge of the per-

pendicular bank, and had either fallen over *in* his sleep, or in the act of awaking. He (the coroner) thought it must have been the former, as no cry appeared to have been made, or heard. Under these circumstances, he believed the jury could have no difficulty in arriving at their verdict.

The last word, "verdict," was still on his tongue when some commotion took place at the end of the room. A working-man, in his shirt-sleeves and a leather apron on, was pushing in through the crowd at the door, making straight for the table and the coroner. Some of the jury knew him for John Dance, a glove-cutter at a Quaker gentleman's manufactory hard by. He begged pardon of the gentlefolk for coming amid 'em abrupt like that, he said, just as he was, but something had but now come to his hearing about the poor little boy who had died. It made him fear he had not fell of himself, but been flung over, and he had thought it his duty to come and tell it.

The consternation this suggestion created, delivered in its homely words, would not be easy to describe. Captain Sanker, who had been sitting against the wall, got up in agitation. John Dance was asked his grounds for what he said, and was entering into a long rigmarole of a tale when the coroner stopped him, and bade him simply say how it had come to his own knowledge. He answered that upon going home just now to tea, from his work, his son Harry,

who was in St. Peter's School, told him of it, having been sent to do so by the master, Clerk Jones. His son was with him, waiting to be questioned.

The boy came forward, very red and sheepish, looking as though he thought he was going to be hung. He stammered and stuttered in giving his answers to the coroner.

The tale he told was this. His name was Henry Dance, aged thirteen. He was on the hill, not very far from St. Ann's Well, on the Tuesday afternoon, looking about for Mark Ferrar. All on a sudden he heard some quarrelling below him : somebody seemed to be in a foaming passion, and little King the lame boy called out in a fright, " Oh, don't ! don't ! you'll throw me over ! " Heard then a sort of rustle of shrubs—as it sounded to him—and then heard the steps of some one running away along the path below the upright bank. Couldn't *see* anything of this ; the bank prevented him ; but did see the arm of the boy who was running as he turned round the corner. Didn't see the boy ; only saw his left arm swaying ; he had got a green handkerchief in his hand. Could not tell whether it was one of their boys (St. Peter's) or one of the college boys ; didn't see enough of him for that. Didn't know then that anything bad had happened, and thought no more about it at all ; didn't hear of it till the next morning : he had been in the first van that

left Malvern, and went to bed as soon as he got home.

The account was listened to breathlessly. The boy was in a regular fright while he told it, but his tones and looks seemed honest and true.

"How did you know it was King Sanker's voice you heard?" asked the coroner.

"Please, sir, I didn't know it," was the answer. "When I came to hear of his fall the next day, I supposed it must ha' been his. I didn't know anybody had fell down; I didn't hear no cry."

"What time in the afternoon was this?"

"Please, sir, I don't know exact. We had our tea at four: it warn't over-long after that."

"Did you recognise the other voice?"

"No, sir. 'Twas a boy's voice."

"Was it one you had ever heard before?"

"I couldn't tell, sir; I wasn't near enough to hear or to catch the words. King Sanker spoke last, just as I got over the spot."

"You heard of the accident the next morning, you say. Did you hear of it early?"

"It was afore breakfast, sir. Some of our boys that waited for the last van telled me; and Ferrar, he telled me. They said they had helped to look for him."

"And then it came into your mind that it was King Sanker you had heard speak?"

"Yes, sir, it did. It come right into my mind, all sudden like, that he might have been throwed over."

“Well now, Mr. Harry Dance, how was it that you did not at once hasten to report this? How is it that you have kept it in till now?”

Harry Dance looked too confused and frightened to answer. He picked at the band of his grey cap and stood, first on one foot, then on the other. The coroner pressed the question sharply, and he replied in confusion.

Didn't like to tell it. Knew people were saying it might have been one of their boys that had pitched him over. Was afraid to tell. Did say a word to Mark Ferrar; not much: Ferrar wanted to know more, and what it was he meant, but didn't tell him. That was yesterday morning. Had felt uncomfortable ever since then, wanting to tell, but not liking to. This afternoon, in school, writing their copies at the desk, he had told Tom Wood'art, the carpenter's son, who sat next him; leastways, had said the college boy had not fell of hisself, but been pitched over; and Tom Wood'art had made him tell it to another boy, Collins; and then the two had went up to the desk and telled their master, Mr. Jones; and Mr. Jones, after calling him up to ask about it, had ordered him home to tell it all to his father; and his father said he must come and tell it here.

The father, John Dance, spoke up again to confirm this, so far as his part went. He was so anxious it should be told to the gentlemen at once, he repeated, that he had come out all un-

tidy as he was, not stopping to put himself to rights in any way.

The next person to step forward was Mr. Jones, in his white cravat and black clothes. He stated that the two boys, Thomas Woodward and James Collins, had made this strange communication to him. Upon which he had questioned Dance, and at once despatched him home to acquaint his father.

“What sort of a boy is Harry Dance, Mr. Jones?” inquired the coroner. “A truthful boy?—one to be depended on? Some boys, as I dare say you know, are capable of romancing in the most unaccountable manner: inventing lies by the bushel.”

“The boy is truthful, sir; a sufficiently good boy,” was the reply. “Some of them are just what you describe; but Dance, so far as I believe, may be relied upon.”

“Well, now, if this is to be credited, it must have been one of St. Peter’s boys who threw the deceased over,” observed a jurymen at the other end. “Did you do it yourself, Harry Dance? Stand straight, and answer.”

“No, sir: I shouldn’t never like to do such a cowardly thing,” was the answer, given with a burst of fear—if the look of his face might be trusted. “I was not anigh him.”

“It must have been one of you. This is the result of that fight you two sets of boys

held on Saturday. You have been harbouring malice."

"Please, sir, I wasn't in the fight on Saturday. I had went over to Clains on an errand for mother."

"That's true," said Clerk Jones. "Dance was not in the fight at all. As far as I can ascertain, there was no ill-feeling displayed on either side at Malvern; no quarrelling of any kind." And Captain Sanker, who was standing up to listen, confirmed this.

"The natural deduction to be drawn is, that if the deceased was flung over, it was by one of St. Peter's boys—though the probability is that he did not intend to inflict much injury," observed one of the jury to the rest. Boys are so reprehensibly thoughtless. Come, Harry Dance! if you did not give him a push yourself, you can tell, I dare say, who did."

But Dance, with tears in his eyes, affirmed that he knew no more than he had told: he had not the least notion who the boy was that had been quarrelling with King. He saw none of the boys, St. Peter's boys or college boys, about the hill at that time; though he was looking out for them, because he wanted to find Ferrar: and he knew no more than the dead what boy it was who had run away, for he saw nothing but his arm and a green handkerchief.

"Did you find Ferrar after that?" resumed the coroner.

"Yes, sir ; not long after. I found him looking for me round on the t'other side o' St. Ann's Well."

"By the way—on which side of St. Ann's Well is situated the spot where you heard the quarrel?"

"On the right-hand side, sir, looking *down* the hill," said the boy. And by the stress laid on the "down," I judged him to be given to exactness. "I know the place, sir. If you take a sideways path from the Well bearing down'ards, you come to it. It's shady and quiet there ; a place that nobody hardly finds out."

"Did you say anything to Ferrar, when you found him, of what you had heard?"

"No, sir. I didn't think any more about it. I didn't think any harm had been adone."

"But you did mention it to Ferrar the next morning?"

"Yes, sir, I had heard of it, then."

"What did you say?"

"I only said I was afeared he might have been throwed over. Ferrar asked me why, but I didn't like to say no more, for fear o' doing mischief. It wasn't me," added Dance, appealing piteously to the jury. "I'd not have hurt a hair of his head : he was weak and lame."

"Is Ferrar here?" cried the coroner. "We must have him."

Ferrar was not there. And Mr. Jones, speaking up, said he had seen nothing of Ferrar

since the previous day. He was informed that he had taken French leave to go off somewhere—which kind of leave, in point of fact, he added, Master Ferrar was much in the habit of taking.

“But where has he gone?” cried the coroner. “You don’t mean he has decamped?”

“Decamped for the time being,” said Mr. Jones. “He will no doubt put in an appearance in a day or two.”

Not one of the jury but pricked up his ears; not one, I could see it in their faces, but was beginning to speculate on this absence of Ferrar’s. The coroner was staring straight before him, speculating too: and just then Fred Sanker said something in a half whisper.

“Ferrar was with my brother King at the spot where he fell from. As far as we know he was the last person who ever saw him alive,”

“And not here!” cried the coroner. “Why is he not? Where does the neglect lie, I wonder? Gentlemen, I think we had better send round for his father, and ask an explanation.”

In a small town like Worcester (small in comparison with great capitals) the inhabitants, rich and poor, mostly know one another, what they are, and where their dwelling is. Old Ferrar lived within a stone’s throw of the Angel; he was a china painter, employed by the Messrs. Chamberlain. Somebody ran for him; and he came; a tidy-looking man in a good coat, with

grey whiskers and grey hair. He bowed civilly to the room, and gave his name as Thomas Ferrar.

As far as anything connected with what took place at Malvern he was in total ignorance, he said. When his son Mark got home on the Tuesday night, he had told him that Captain Sanker's little boy had fallen down a part of the hill, and that he, Mark, had been one of those who helped to find him. In the afternoon of the same day they heard the little boy had died.

"Where is your son?" asked the coroner.

"I am not sure where he is," replied Thomas Ferrar. "When I and his brother got home from the factory on Wednesday evening, my daughter told me Mark had gone off again. Somebody had given him half-a-crown I believe. With that in his pocket, he was pretty sure to go off on one of his rovings."

"He is in the habit of going off, then?"

"Yes, sir, he has done it on occasion almost ever since he could run alone. I used to leather him well for it, but it was of no use; it didn't stop it. It's his only fault. Barring that, he's as good and upright a lad as anybody need have. He does not go off for the purpose of doing harm: neither does he get into any."

"Where does he go to?"

"Always to one of two places: to South Crabb, or to his grandfather's at Pinvin. It's

generally to South Crabb, to see the Batleys, who are cousins of my late wife's. They've got boys and girls of Mark's own age, and he likes to be there."

"You conclude then that he is at one of these places now?"

"Sure to be, sir: and I think it's sure to be South Crabb. He was at Pinvin a fortnight ago; for I walked over on the Sunday morning and took him with me. Mark is of a roving turn; he is always talking of wanting to see the world. I don't believe he'll ever settle down to steady work at home."

"Well, we want him here, Mr. Ferrar; and must have him too. Could you send after him—and get him here by to-morrow?"

"I can send his brother after him, if you say it must be. The likelihood is that he will come home of himself to-morrow evening."

"Ay, but we must have him here in the afternoon, you see. We want to hear what he can tell us about the deceased. It is thought that he was the last person with him before the fall. And, gentlemen," added the coroner, turning to the jury, "I will adjourn proceedings to the same hour to-morrow—three o'clock."

So the inquest was adjourned accordingly, and the room slowly cleared itself. Very slowly. People stood in groups of threes and fours to talk to each other. This new evidence was startling: and the impression it made was, that

one of the Frogs had certainly thrown down King.

The green handkerchief was mentioned. Coloured silk pocket-handkerchiefs were much patronised by gentlemen then, and the one used by Dr. Teal that day happened to be green. The doctor said he had missed his handkerchief when they were down at the Abbey before tea, but could not tell where he had left it. He found it in the room at St. Ann's when they got up again, and supposed it had been there all along. So that handkerchief was not much thought of: especially as several of the Frogs had green neckerchiefs on, and might have taken them off, as it was very hot. That a Frog had flung King over, appeared to be, to use the coroner's words on another part of the subject, as plain as a turnpike. The Sankers, one and all, adopted it as conclusive; Captain Sanker in particular was nearly wild, and said bitter things of the Frogs. Poor King still lay in the same room, and none of them, as before, cared to go by the door.

It must have been in the middle of the night. Any way, it looked pitch-dark. I was asleep, and dreaming that we were sorting handkerchiefs: all colours seemed to be there but a green one, and that--the one being looked for—we could not find: when something suddenly woke me. A hand was grasping at my shoulder.

"Halloa! who's there?"

"I say, Johnny, I can't stop in my bed; I've come to yours. If you mind my getting in, I'll lie across the foot, and get to sleep that way."

The voice was Dan's, and it had no end of horror in it. He was standing by the bed in his nightshirt, shivering. And yet the summer's night was hot.

"Get in if you like, Dan: there's plenty of room. What's the matter with your own bed?"

"King's there," he said in a dreadful whisper, as he crept trembling in.

"King! Why, what do you mean?"

"He comes in and lies down in his place just as he used to lie," shivered Dan. "I asked Toby to sleep with me to-night, and Fred wouldn't let him. Fred ought to be ashamed; it's all his ill-nature. He's bigger than I am, one of the seniors, and he never cares whether he sleeps alone or not."

"But, Dan, you should not get these fancies in your head about King. You know it's not true."

"I tell you it is true. King's there. First of all, he stood at the foot of the bed and looked at me; and then, when I hid my face, I found he had got into it. He's lying there, just as he used to lie, his head turned to the wall."

"To begin with, you couldn't see him—him, or anyone else. It's too dark."

"It's not dark. My room's lighter than this;

it has a bigger window: and the sky was bright and the stars were out. Anyway, Johnny, it was light enough to see King—and there he was. Do you think I'd tell a lie over it?"

I can't say I felt very comfortable myself. It's not pleasant to be woke up with this kind of thing at the top of a house when somebody's lying dead underneath. Dan's voice was enough to give one the shivers, let alone his words. Some stars came out, and I could see the outline of the furniture: or perhaps the stars had been shining all along; only, on first awaking the eye is not accustomed to the darkness.

"Try and go to sleep, Dan. You'll be all right in the morning."

To go to sleep seemed, however, to be far enough from Dan's thoughts. After a bit of uneasy turning and trembling—and I'm sure anyone would have said his legs had caught St. Vitus's Dance—he gave sleep up as a bad job, and broke out now and again with all kinds of detached comments. I could only lie and listen.

Wondered whether he should be seeing King always?—if so, would rather be dead. Wished he had not gone to sleep on that confounded bench outside St. Ann's Well—might have been at hand near King, and saved him, if he had not. It was that beastly bottled ale that

made him. Wished bottled ale had not been invented. Wished he could wring Dance's neck—or Ferrar's—or that Wood'art's, whichever of the lot it was that had struck King. Knew it was one of the three. What on earth could have taken the Frogs to Malvern that day?—Wished every Frog ever born was hanged or drowned. Thought it must be Ferrar—else why had the fellow decamped? Thought the whole boiling of Frogs should be driven from the town—how dared they, the insolent charity beggars, have their school near the college school? Wondered what would be done to Ferrar if it was proved against him? Wished it had been Ferrar to fall down in place of King. Wished it had been himself (Dan) rather than King. Poor King!—who was always so gentle—and never gave offence to any of them—and was so happy with his hymns and his fancies, and his poetry!—and had said “Lord Bateman” for them that day when told to say it, and—and—

At this thought Dan broke fairly down and sobbed as though his heart were breaking. I felt uncommonly sorry for him; he had been very fond of King; and I was sorry for his superstition. What a mistake it seemed for Mrs. Sanker to have allowed them to grow up in it!

At three o'clock the next day the inquest met again. The coroner and jury, who seemed

to have got thoroughly interested in the case now, kept their time to a minute. There was much stir in the neighbourhood, and the street was full before the Angel Inn. As to Frog Lane, it was said the excitement there had never been equalled. The report that it was one of St. Peter's boys who had done it, went echoing everywhere; nobody thought of doubting it. *I* did not. Watching Harry Dance's face when he had given his evidence, I felt sure that every word he said was true. Some one *had* flung King over: and that some one, there could be no question of it, was one of those common adversaries, the Frogs. If King must have gone to sleep that afternoon, better that Dan, as he had said, or one of the rest of us, had stayed by to protect him!

Mark Ferrar had turned up. His brother found him at South Crabb. He came to the inquest in his best clothes, those he had worn at Malvern. I noticed then, but I had not remembered it, that he had a grass-green neckerchief on, tied with a large bow and ends. His good-natured, ugly, honest face was redder than ever as he stood to give his evidence. He did not show any of the stammering confusion that Dance had done, but spoke out with modest self-possession.

His name was Mark Ferrar, aged nearly fourteen (and looking ever so much older), second son of Thomas Ferrar, china painter.

He had seen the deceased boy, King Sanker, at Malvern on Tuesday. When he and some more of St. Peter's boys were coming down the hill they had met King and his party. King spoke to him and told his father, Captain Sanker, that he was the Frog—the college boys called them Frogs—who had picked him up out of the fight on Saturday to save him from being crushed: and Captain Sanker thanked him and gave him half-a-crown to spend in Malvern cakes. Master Johnny Ludlow was with the Sankers, and saw and heard this. Did not buy the Malvern cakes: had meant to, and treat the rest of the boys; but dinner was ready near the foot of the hill when they got down, and forgot it afterwards. After dinner he and a lot more boys went up another of the beacons and down on the Herefordshire side. They got back about four o'clock, and had bread and butter and cider for tea. Then he and Harry Dance went up the hill again, taking two ways, to see which would be at St. Ann's Well first. Couldn't see Dance when he got up, thought he might be hiding, and went looking about for him. Went along a side-path leading off from St. Ann's; 'twas sheltered, and thought Dance might be there. Suddenly heard himself called to: looked onwards, and saw the lame boy, King Sanker, there, and some chairs and glasses on a table. Went on, and King asked him to sit down, and began

talking to him, saying he had had to say "Lord Bateman" before them all. He, Ferrar, did not know what "Lord Bateman" was, and King said he would say it to him. Began to say it; found it was poetry verses: King had said a good many when he broke off in the middle of one, and told him to go then, for they were coming. Did not know who "they" meant, did not see or hear anybody himself; but went away accordingly. Went looking all about for Dance again; found him by-and-by on a kind of plateau on the other side of St. Ann's. They went up the hill together, and only got down again when it was time to start for Worcester. He did not go in the first van; there was no room; waited for the second. Saw the other party starting: heard that some one was missing: found it was King; offered to help to look for him. Was going up with the rest past the Unicorn, when some people met them, saying they'd heard groans. Ran on, and found it was King Sanker. He seemed to have fallen right down from the place where he had been sitting in the afternoon, and where he, Ferrar, had left him.

Such in substance was the evidence he gave. Some of it I could corroborate, and did. I told of King's asking that Ferrar might go up to him the next day, and of his promising him "Lord Bateman," which he had got by him, written out.

But Ferrar was not done with. Important

questions had to be asked him yet. Sometimes it was the coroner who put them, sometimes one or another of the jury.

"Did you see anything at all of the deceased after leaving him as you have described, Mark Ferrar?"

"No, sir. I never saw him again till night, when we found him lying under a part of the hill."

"When you quitted him at his bidding, did you see any boys about, either college boys or St. Peter's boys?"

"No, sir, I did not see any; not one. The hills about there seemed as lonely as could be."

"Which way did you take when you left him?"

"I ran straight past St. Ann's, and got on to the part that divides the Worcestershire beacon from the next. Waiting for Dance, I sat down on the slope, and looked at Worcester for a bit, trying how much of the town I could make out, and how many of the churches, and that. As I was going back toward St. Ann's I met Dance."

"What did Dance say to you?"

"He said he had been hunting for me, and wanted to know where I had hid myself, and I said I had been hunting for him. We went on up the hill then and met some more of our boys; and we stayed all together till it was time to go down."

Did Dance say that he had heard sounds of quarrelling?"

"No, sir, never a word."

"What communication did Dance make to you on the subject the following morning?"

"Nothing certain, sir. Dance went home in the first van, and he didn't hear about King Sanker till the morning. I was saying then how we found him and that he must have fell straight off from the place above. Dance stopped me, and said was it sure that he fell—was it sure he had not been pushed off? I asked why he said that, but he wouldn't answer."

"Did he refuse to answer?"

"I kept asking him to tell me, but he just said it was only a fancy that came to him. He had interrupted so eager like, that I thought he must have heard something. Later, I asked Master Johnny Ludlow whether the boy had been pushed off, but he said no. I couldn't get it out of my head, however."

"What clothes did you wear, witness, that day at Malvern?"

"These here that I've got on now, sir."

"Did you wear that same green neckerchief?"

"Yes, sir. My sister Sally bought it new for me to go in."

"Did you take it off at Malvern?"

"No, sir."

"Not at all."

"No, sir. Some of them took their handkerchers off at dinner, because it was hot, but I didn't."

"Why did you not?"

For the first time Ferrar hesitated. His face turned scarlet.

"Come, speak up. The truth, mind."

"Sally had told me not to mess my new silk handkercher, for I wasn't likely to have another o' one while; and I thought if I got untying and re-tying of it, I should mess it." It seemed quite a task to Ferrar to confess this. He feared the boys would laugh at him. But I think nobody doubted that it was the true reason.

"You did not take it off while you were sitting with the deceased?"

"No, sir. I never took it off all day."

"Take it off now."

Mark Ferrar looked too surprised to understand the order, and did nothing. The coroner repeated it.

"Take off this here handkercher, sir? Now?"

"Yes. The jury wish to see it open."

Mark untied the bow and pulled it off, his very freckles showing out red. It was a three-cornered silk neckerchief, as green as grass.

"Was this like the kerchief you saw being swung about, Harry Dance?" asked the coroner, holding it up, and then letting it fall on the table.

Harry Dance gazed at it as it lay, and shook his head. "I don't think it were the one, sir," he said.

"Why don't you think it?"

"That there looks smaller and brighter, and

t'other was bigger and darker. Leastways, I think it were."

"Was it more like this?" interrupted Dr. Teal, shaking out his handkerchief from his pocket.

"I don't know, sir. It seemed like a big handkercher, and was about that there colour o' your'n."

Some inquiry was made at this point as to the neckerchiefs worn by the other boys. It turned out that two or three had worn very large ones, something the colour of Dr. Teal's. So that passed.

"One word, Harry Dance. Did you see Ferrar with his handkerchief off that day?"

"I didn't notice, sir: I don't remember. Some of us took 'em off on the hills—'twas very hot—and never put 'em on again all day."

The coroner and jury talked together, and then Harry Dance was told to repeat the evidence he had given the day before. He went over it again: the sounds of quarrelling, and the words in the voice he had supposed to be King's: "Oh, don't—don't! you'll throw me over."

"Had Ferrar his neckerchief on when you met him soon after this?" questioned Captain Chamberlain.

"I think he had, sir. I think if he had not I should ha' noticed it. I'm nearly as sure as I can be that it warn't off."

When Dance was done with, Mark Ferrar was begun upon again.

"What induced you to go off from your home on Wednesday evening without notice?" asked the coroner.

"I went to South Crabb, sir."

"I don't ask you where you went, I ask why you went?"

"I go over there sometimes, sir. I told Sally I was going."

"Can't you understand my question? *Why* did you go?"

"Nothing particular made me go, sir. Only that I had got some money; and I was feeling so sorry that the little lame boy was dead, I couldn't bear to be still."

"You have been punished often, Mark Ferrar, for going off on these expeditions?" cried one of the jury.

"I used to be, sir. Father has leathered me for it at home, and Clerk Jones at school. I can't do without going out a bit. I wish I was a sailor."

"Oh, indeed! Well—is there one of your companions that you can suspect of having harmed this poor little boy—accidentally or otherwise?"

"No, sir. It is being said that he was pushed over in ill-feeling, or else by accident; but it don't seem likely."

"Did you push him over yourself?"

"Me!" returned Ferrar in surprise. "Me push him over!"

"As far as we can learn yet, no one was with him there but you."

"I'd have saved him from it, sir, if I had been there, instead of harming him. When he sent me away he was all right, and not sitting anigh the edge. If it was me that had done it, sir, he'd not have asked for me to go up to him in his room—and shook hands—and said I should see him in Heaven."

Mark Ferrar broke down at the remembrance, and sobbed like a child. I don't think one single person present thought it was he, especially the coroner and jury. But the question was—which of the other boys could it have been?

Several of them were called before the coroner. One and all declared they had done no harm to the deceased—had not been near him to do it—would not have done it if they had been—did not know he had been sitting in the place talked of—did not (most of them) know where the spot was now. In short, they denied it utterly.

Mr. Jones stepped forward then. He told the coroner and jury that he had done his best to come to the bottom of the affair, but could not find out anything. He did not believe one of his boys had been in it; they were mischievous enough, as he well knew, and sometimes deceit-

ful enough ; but they all seemed to be, and he honestly believed *were*, innocent of this.

The room was cleared while the jury deliberated. Their verdict was to the effect that Kingsley Sanker had died from falling over a portion of one of the Malvern Hills ; but whether the fall was caused by accident, or not, there was not sufficient evidence to show.

It was late when it was over. Getting dusk. In turning out of the inn passage to the street, I remember the great buzz around, and the people pushing one's elbows ; and I can't remember much more. If one Frog was there, it seemed to me that there were hundreds.

I stayed at Captain Sanker's again that night. We all went up to bed after supper and prayers—which the captain read. He said he could not divest himself of the idea that it was a pure accident—for who would be likely to harm a helpless lad ?—and that what Dance heard must have been some passing dispute connected with other people.

“ Come along, Johnny : this one candle 'll do for us both,” cried Dan, taking up a bed candlestick and waiting for me to follow him.

I kept close to him as we went by the room—the room, you know—for Dan was worse than any of them for passing it. He and King had been much together. King followed him in age ; they had always slept together and gone to

school together ; the rest were older or younger—and naturally Dan felt it most.

“ I shan’t be a minute, Johnny, and then you can take the candle,” said he, when we got to the top. “ Come in.”

Before I had well turned round, after getting in, I declare Dan had rushed all his things off in a heap and leaped into bed. Poor King had not used to be so quick, and Dan always made him put the light out.

“ Good-night, Dan.”

“ Good-night, Johnny. I hope I shall get to sleep.”

He put his head under the bed-clothes as I went away with the candle. I was not long getting into bed, either. The stars were bright in the sky.

Before there was time to get to sleep, Dan came bursting in, shivering as on the past night, and asking to be let get into the bed. I did not mind his being in the bed—liked it rather, for company—but I did think it a great stupid pity that he should be giving way to these superstitious fears as though he were a girl.

“ Look here, Dan : I should be above it. One of the smallest of those Frogs couldn’t show out more silly than this.”

“ He’s in my bed again, Johnny. Lying down. I can’t sleep there another night.”

“ You know that he is below in his coffin—with the room-door locked.”

"I don't care—he's there in the bed. You had no sooner gone with the light, than King crept in and lay down beside me. He used to have a way of putting his left arm over me outside the clothes, and he put it so to-night."

"Dan !"

"I tell you he did. Nobody would believe it, but he did. I felt it like a weight. It was heavy, just as dead arms are. Johnny, if this goes on, I shall die. Have you heard what mamma says ?"

"No. What."

"She says *she* saw King last night. She couldn't sleep ; and by-and-by, happening to look out of bed, she saw him standing there. He was looking very solemn, and did not speak. She turned to awake papa, in spite of the way he goes on ridiculing such things, but when she looked next King had gone. I wish he was buried, Johnny ; I shouldn't think he could come back into the house then. Should you ?"

"He's not in it now—in that sense. It's all imagination."

"Is it ! I should like you to have been in my bed, instead of me ; you'd have seen whether it was imagination or not. Do you suppose his heavy arm across me was fancy ?"

"Well, he does not come in here. Let us go to sleep. Good-night, Dan."

Dan lay still for a good bit, and I was nearly

asleep when he awoke me sobbing. His face was turned the other way.

"I wish you'd kill me, Johnny."

"Kill you!"

"I don't care to live any longer without King. It is so lonely. There's nobody now. Fred's getting to be almost a man, and Toby's a little duffer. King was best. I've many a time snubbed him and boxed him, and I always put upon him; and—and now he's gone. I wish I had fell down instead of him."

"You'll get over it, Dan."

"Perhaps. But it's such a thing to get over. And the time goes so slowly. I wish it was this time next year!"

"Do you know what some of the doctors say?"

"What do they say?" returned Dan, putting the top of his face out of bed.

"Dr. Teal told Captain Sanker of it; I was by and heard him. They think that poor King would not have lived above another year, or so: that there was no chance of his living to grow up. So you might have lost him soon in any case, Dan."

"But he'd have been here till then; he'd not have died through falling down Malvern Hill. Oh, and to think that I was rough with him often!—and didn't try to help him when he wanted it!—and laughed at his poetry! Johnny, I wish you'd kill me! I wish it had been me to fall over instead of him!"

“There was not one of them that felt it as keenly as Dan did ; but the chances were that he would forget King the soonest. Dan was of that impetuous warm nature that’s all fire at first ; and all forgetfulness when the fire goes out.

I went home the next day to Crabb Cot. Mr. Coney came into Worcester to attend the corn-market, and offered to drive me back in his gig. So I took my leave of the Sankers, and my last look at poor King in his coffin. He was to be buried on Monday in St. Peter’s churchyard.

The next news we had from Worcester was that Mark Ferrar had gone to sea. His people had wanted him to take up some trade at home ; but Mark said he was not going to stay there to be told every day of his life that he killed King Sanker. For some of the Frogs had taken up the notion that it must have been he—why else, they asked, did the coroner and the rest of ’em want to see his green handkercher shook out ? So his father, who was just as much hurt at the aspersions as Mark, allowed him to have his way and go to sea ; in spite of Sally crying her eyes out, and foretelling that he would come home drowned. Mark was sent to London to some friend, who undertook to make the neces-

sary arrangements ; he was bound apprentice to the sea, and shipped off in a trading vessel sailing for Spain.

It was Michaelmas when we next went in to Worcester (save for a day at the festival), driving in from Dyke Manor : the Squire, Mrs. Todhetley, and I. You have heard the expedition mentioned before, for it was the one when we hired the dairymaid, Grizzel, at St. John's mop. That business over, we went down to Captain Sanker's and found them at home.

They were all getting pretty well over the death now, except Dan. Dan's grief and nervousness were as bad as ever. Worse, even. Captain and Mrs. Sanker enlarged upon it.

"Dan grieves after his brother dreadfully : they were always companions, you see," said the captain. "He has foolish fancies also : thinks he sees King continually. We've had to put him to sleep with Fred downstairs, for nothing would persuade him that King, poor fellow, did not come and get into his old place in bed. The night the poor lad was buried, Dan startled the whole house up ; he flew down the stairs crying and shrieking, and saying that King was there. We don't know what to do : he seems to get worse, rather than better. Did you notice how thin he has become ? You saw him as you came in."

"Like a bag o' bones," said the Squire.

"Ay. Some days he is so nervous and ill he

can't go to school. I never knew such a thing, for my part. I was for trying flogging, but his mother wouldn't have it."

"But—do you mean to tell us, Sanker, that he fancies he sees King's *ghost*?" cried the Squire, in great amazement.

"Well, I suppose so," answered the captain. "He fancies he sees *him*: and poor King, as far as this world's concerned, can be nothing but a ghost now. The other evening, when Dan had been commanded to the head-master's house for something connected with the studies and detained till after dark, he came rushing in with a white face and his hair all wet, saying he had met King under the elm trees, as he was running back through the green towards Edgar Tower. How can you deal with such a case?"

"I should say flogging would be as good as anything," said the Squire, decidedly.

"So I thought at first. He's too ill for it now. There's nothing, hardly, left of him to flog."

"Captain Sanker, there is only one thing for you to do," put in Mrs. Todhetley. "And that is, consult a clever medical man."

"Why, my dear lady, we have taken him to pretty nearly all the medical men in Worcester," cried the captain. "He goes regularly to Dr. Hastings."

"And what do the doctors say?"

"They think that the catastrophe of King's

unhappy death has seized upon the lad's mind, and brought on a sort of hypochondriacal affection. One of them said it was what the French would call a *maladie des nerfs*. Dan seems so full of self-reproach, too."

"What for?"

"Well, for not having made more of King when he was living. And also, I think, for having suffered himself to fall asleep that afternoon on the bench outside the Well: he says had he kept awake he might have been with King, and so saved him. But, as I tell Dan, there's nothing to reproach himself with in that: he could not foresee that King would meet with the accident. The doctors say now that he must have change of air, and be got away altogether. They recommend the sea."

"The sea! Do you mean sea air?"

"No; the sea itself; a voyage: and Dan's wild to go. A less complete change than that, they think, will be of little avail, for his illness borders almost—almost upon lunacy. I'm sure, what with one thing and another, we seem to be in for a peck of misfortunes," added the captain, rumpling his hair helplessly.

"And shall you let him go to sea?"

"Well, I don't know. I stood out against it at first. Never meant to send a son of mine to sea; that has always been my resolution. Look at what I had to starve upon for ever so many years—a lieutenant's half pay—and to keep my

wife and bring up my children upon it! You can't imagine it, Squire; it's cruel. Dan's too old for the navy, however; and, if he does go, it must be into the merchant service. I don't like that, either; we regular sailors never do like it, we hold ourselves above it; but there's a better chance of getting on in it and of making money."

"I'm sure I am very sorry for it altogether," said Mrs. Todhetley. "A sailor cannot have any comfort."

"I expect he'll have to go," said the captain, ruefully: "he must get these ideas out of his head. It's such a thing, you see, for him to be always fancying he sees King."

"It is a dreadful thing."

"My wife had a brother once who was always seeing odd colours where-so-ever he looked: colours and shadows and things. But that was not as bad as this. His doctor called it nerves: and I conclude Dan takes after him."

"My dear, I think Dan takes after your side, not mine," calmly put in Mrs. Sanker, who had her light hair flowing and something black in it that looked like a feather. "He is so very passionate, you know: and I could not go into a passion if I tried."

"I suppose he takes after us both," returned Captain Sanker. "I'll vow he never got his superstitious fancies from me, or from anybody belonging to me. We may be of a passionate

nature, we Sankers, but we don't see ghosts."

In a week or two's time after that, Dan was off to sea. A large shipping firm, trading from London to India, took him as midshipman. The ship was called the *Bangalore*; a fine vessel of about fourteen hundred tons, bound for some port out there. When Captain Sanker came back from shipping him off, he was full of spirits, and said Dan was cured already. No sooner was Dan amidst the bustle of London, than his fears and fancies left him.

It was sometime in the course of the next spring—getting on for summer, I think—that Captain Sanker gave up his house in Worcester and went abroad, somewhere into Germany. Partly from motives of economy, for they had no idea of saving, and somehow spent more than their income; partly to see if change would get up Mrs. Sanker's health, which was failing. After that, we heard nothing more of them: and a year or two went on.

"Please, sir, here's a young man asking to see you."

"A young man asking to see me," cried the Squire—we were just finishing dinner. "Who is it, Thomas?"

"I don't know, sir," replied old Thomas. "Some smart young fellow dressed as a sailor. I've showed him into your room, sir."

“Go and see who it is, Johnny.”

It was summer-time, and we were at home at Dyke Manor. I went on to the little square room. You have been in it too. Opposite the Squire's old bureau and underneath the map of Warwickshire on the wall, sat the sailor. He had good blue clothes on and a turned down white collar, and held a straw hat in his hand. Where had I seen the face?—A very red-brown honest face, with a mouth as wide as Molly's rolling-pin. Wider, now that it was smiling.

He stood up, and turned his straw hat about a little nervously. “You've forgotten me, Master Johnny. Mark Ferrar, please, sir.”

Mark Ferrar it was, looking shorter and broader; and I put out my hand to him. I take my likes and dislikes, as you have already heard, and can't help taking them; and Ferrar was one whom I had always liked.

“Please, sir, I've made bold to come over here,” he went on. “Captain Sanker's left Worcester, they tell me, and I can't hear where he is to be found: and the Teals, they have left. I've brought news to him from his son, Mr. Dan: and father said I had better come over here and tell it, and maybe Squire Todhetley might get it sent to the captain.”

“Have you seen anything of Mr. Dan, then?”

“I've been with him nearly all the time, Master Johnny. We served on the same ship:

he as middy and I as working apprentice. Not but what the middies are apprenticed just as sure as we are. They don't do our rough work, the cleaning and that, and they mess apart; but that's pretty nigh all the difference."

"And how are you getting on, Mark?"

"First-rate, sir. The captain and officers are satisfied with me, and when I've served my four years I shall go up to pass for second mate. I try to improve myself a bit in general learning at odd moments too, sir, seeing I didn't have much. It may be of use to me if I ever get up a bit in life. Mr. Dan, he——"

"But look here, Ferrar," I interrupted, the recollection striking me. "How came you and Mr. Dan to sail together? You were on a small home-coasting barque: he went in an Indiaman."

"I was in the barque first of all, Master Johnny, and took a voyage to Spain and back. But our owners, hearing a good report of me, that I was likely to make a smart and steady sailor, put me on their big ship, the *Bangalore*. In a day or two Mr. Dan Sanker came on board."

"And how is he getting on? Does he——"

"If you please, Master Johnny, I'd like to tell what I've got to tell about him to the Squire," he interrupted. "It is for that, sir, I have come all the way over here."

So I called the Squire in. The following was the condensed substance of Ferrar's narrative.

What with his way of telling it, and what with the Squire's interruptions, it was rather long.

"Mr. Dan joined the *Bangalore* the day we sailed, sir. When he saw me as one of the sailors he started back as if I shocked him. But in a week or two, when he had got round from his sea-sickness, he grew friendly, and sometimes talked a bit. I used to bring up Master King's death, and say how sorry I was for it—for you see, sir, I couldn't bear that he should think it true that I had had a hand in it. But he seemed to hate the subject; he'd walk away if I began it, and at last he said he couldn't stand the talking about King; so I let it be. Our voyage was a long one, for the ship went about from port to port. Mr. Dan——"

"What sort of a sailor did he make?" interrupted the Squire.

"Well, sir, he was a good smart sailor at his work, but he got to be looked upon as rather a queer kind of young man. He couldn't bear to keep his night watches—it was too lonely, he said; and several times he fell into trouble for calling up the hands when there was nothing to call them up for. At Hong Kong he had a fever, and they shaved his head; but he got well again. One evening, after we had left Hong Kong and were on our way to San Francisco, I was on deck—almost dark it was—when Mr. Dan comes down the rigging all in a heap, just as if a wild-cat was after him.

‘There’s King up there,’ he says to me: and Mr. Conroy, do what he would, couldn’t get him up again. After that he went about the ship peeping and peering, always fancying King was hiding somewhere and going to pounce out upon him. The captain said his fever was coming back: Mr. Dan said it was not fever it was King. I told him one day what I thought—that Master King had been flung down; that it was not an accident—I felt as sure of it as though I had seen it done; and what I said seemed to put him up, sir. Who did I fancy had done it, or would do it, he asked me all in anger: and I said I did not know who, but if ever I got back to Worcester I’d leave not a stone unturned to find out. Well, sir, he got worse: worse in his fancies, and worse as to sickness. He was seeing King always at night, and he had dysentery and ague, and got so weak that he could hardly stand. One of the cabin boys took sick and died on board. The night he lay below, dead, Mr. Dan burst into the saloon saying it was King who was below, and that he’d never be got out of the ship again. Mr. Conroy—he was the chief mate, sir—humoured him, telling him not to fear, that if it was King he would be buried deep in the sea on the morrow: but Mr. Dan said he’d not stop in the sea, any more than he had stopped in his grave in St. Peter’s churchyard at home; he’d be back in the ship again.”

“Dan Sanker must have been mad,” observed the Squire.

“Yes, sir, I think he was; leastways not right. In a day or two he had to be fastened down in his berth with brain fever, and Mr. Conroy said that as he had known me in the past days I had better be the one to sit with him, for he couldn’t be left. I was quite taken aback to hear what he said in his mutterings, and hoped it wasn’t true.”

“Did he get well again?”

“Just for a day or two, sir. The fever left him, but he was in the shockingest state of weakness you could imagine. The night before he died——”

The Squire started up. “Dan Sanker’s not dead, Ferrar!”

“Yes he is, sir. It’s what I have come to tell of.”

“Goodness bless me! Poor Dan dead! Only think of it, Johnny!”

But I was not surprised. From the moment Ferrar first spoke, an instinct had been upon me that it was so. He resumed.

“Everything was done for him that could be, sir. We had a doctor on board—a passenger going to California—but he could not save him. He said when it came to such awful weakness as that, there could be no saving. Mr. Conroy and the other officers were very kind to him—the skipper too; but they could do nothing. All

his fears seemed to be gone then ; we could hardly hear his whispers, but he was sensible and calm. He said he knew God had forgave him for what he did, and would blot his sin out, and King had forgave him too, and had come to tell him so : he had been to him in the night and talked and smiled happily and said over to him a verse of ‘ Lord Bateman ’——”

“ And you say he was in his senses, Ferrar ? ”

“ Yes, sir, that he was. That night he made a confession, Mr. Conroy and the doctor and me being by him. It was he that killed King.”

“ Bless my heart ! ” cried the Squire.

“ He had seen me sitting with King that afternoon at Malvern, and heard him saying the verses to me. It put his temper up frightful, sir, I being one of their enemies the Frogs ; but he says if he’d known it was me that snatched King out of the fight on Saturday, he’d not have minded so much. It must have been him that King saw coming, Master Johnny,” added Ferrar, turning momentarily from the Squire to address me ; “ when he broke off in the midst of ‘ Lord Bateman,’ and told me, all in a hurry, to go away. He waited till I was gone, and then rushed on to King and began abusing him and knocking him about. King was unsteady through his weak leg, and one of the knocks sent him over the bank. Dan says he was frightened almost to death ; he caught up Dr. Teal’s green handkercher from a chair and ran to the Well with it ; he was

too frightened to go and see after King, thinking he had killed him ; and he sat down outside the Well and made as if he went to sleep. He never meant to hurt King, he said ; it was only passion ; but he had drunk a lot of strong ale and some wine atop of it, and hardly knew what he was about. He said there was never a minute since but what he had been sorry for it, and he had been always seeing King. He asked me to show him the verses that had been gave to me, that King wrote out, ‘ Lord Bateman ’—for I had got them with me at sea, sir—and he kissed them and held them to him till he died.”

“ Dear, dear !” sighed the Squire.

“ And that’s all, sir,” concluded Ferrar. “ Mr. Conroy wrote out a copy of his confession, which I brought along with me to Worcester. Mr. Dan charged me to tell his father, and my own folks, and any other friends I liked that had thought me guilty, and I promised him. He was as placid as a child all the day after that, and died at sun-down, so happy and peaceful that it was a’most like Heaven.”

Ferrar broke off with a sob. Poor Dan !

And that was the final ending of the Day of Pleasure. He and King are together again.

IV.

MARGARET RYMER.

THEY had gone through the snow to evening service at North Crabb, the Squire, Mrs. Todhetley, and Tod, leaving me at home with one of my splitting headaches. Thomas had come in to ask if I would have the lamp, but I told him I would rather be without it. So there I sat on alone, beside the fire, listening to Hannah putting the children to bed upstairs, and looking sleepily out at the snowy landscape.

As the fire became dim, sending the room into gloom, the light outside grew stronger. The moon was high : clear and bright as crystal ; what with that, and the perfectly white snow that lay on everything, the night seemed nearly as light as day. The grass plat outside was a smooth white plain, the clustering shrubs beyond it being also white.

I knew the fire wanted replenishing ; I knew that if I sat on much longer, I should fall asleep ; but sit on I did, letting the fire go, too listless to move. My eyes were fixed dreamily on the

plain of snow, with the still moonlight lying across it. The room grew darker, the landscape lighter.

And asleep, in another minute, I should inevitably have been, but for a circumstance that suddenly arose. All in a moment—I saw not how or whence it came—a dark figure appeared on the grass plat, close before the bank of shrubs, right in front of me; the figure of a man, wrapped in a big greatcoat. He was standing still and gazing fixedly at the house. Gazing, as it seemed (though that was impossible) at *me*. I was wide awake at once, and sitting bolt upright in the chair.

Yes, there could be no mistake; and it was no delusion. The man appeared to be a tall man, strong and bony, with a mass of hair on his face. What could he want? Was it a robber reconnoitring the premises; peering and peeping to ascertain whether all the world was at church, before he broke in to rifle the house?

No one, void of such an experience, can imagine how dark he looked standing there, amid the whiteness of all the scene around. In one sense, he stood out plainer than he could have done by daylight, because the contrast was greater. But this kind of light did not show his features; which were shrouded in obscurity.

Presently he moved. His head went this way and that, and he took a step forward. Evidently he was trying to see whether the

parlour where I sat was empty or occupied. Should I go out to him? Or should I fling up the window and call out to ask what he wanted. I was not frightened: don't let anybody think that: but the watching him brought to me rather a creepy kind of sensation.

And, just then, as I left the chair quietly to open the window, I heard the catch of the garden-gate, and somebody came whistling up the path. The man vanished as if by magic. While I looked, he was gone. It seemed to me that I did not take my eyes off him; but where he went to, or what became of him, I knew not.

"Anybody at home?" called out Tom Coney, as he broke off his whistling and opened the hall-door.

"All right, Tom. Come along."

And, to tell the truth, I was not sorry to see Tom's hearty face. He had stayed away from evening service to sit with his mother.

"I say, Tom, did you see any fellow on the snow there, as you came in?"

"On the snow where?" asked Tom.

"There; close before the shrubs." And I pointed the opposite spot out to him, and told him what had happened. Tom, one of the most practical fellows living, more so, I think, than even Tod, and with less imagination than an ostrich, received the account with incredulity.

"You dropped asleep, Johnny, and fancied it."

"I did not drop asleep, and I did not fancy

it. When you came into the garden, I was about to open the window and call to him."

"Those headaches are downright stupefying things, Johnny. Jane has them, you know. One day I remember she fell asleep with a bad one, and woke up and said the sofa was on fire."

"Tom, I tell you the man was there. A tall, strong-looking fellow with a beard. He was staring at the house with all his might, at this room, as it seemed to me, wanting to come forward, I think, but afraid to. He kept close to the laurels, as if he did not wish to be seen, forgetting perhaps that they were white and betrayed him. When you opened the gate, he was there."

"It's odd, then, where he could have put himself," said Tom Coney, not giving in an inch. "I'll vow not a soul was there, man or woman, when I came up the path."

"That's true. He vanished in a moment. While I was looking at him he disappeared."

"Vanished! Disappeared! You talk as though you thought it a ghost, Johnny."

"Ghost be hanged! It was some ill-doing tramp, I expect, trying to look if he might steal into the house."

"Much you know of the ways of tramps, Johnny Ludlow! Tramps don't come showing themselves on snow-lighted, open lawns, in the face and eyes of the front windows: they hide themselves in obscure hedges and byways. It's

a case of headachy sleep, young man, and nothing else."

"Look here, Tom. If the man was there, his footprints will be there ; if he was not, as you say, the snow will be smooth and level : come out and see."

We went out at once, Tom catching up a stick in the hall, and crossed the lawn. I was right, and Tom wrong. Sure enough, there were the footprints, plenty of them, indented in the deep snow. Tom gave in then.

"I wish to goodness I had seen him! The fellow should not have got off scot-free, I can tell him that. What tremendous feet he must have! Just look at the size, Johnny. Regular crushers."

"Don't you go and say again I was asleep! He must have stepped back and got away through these laurels ; yes, here are the marks. I say, Tom"—dropping my voice to a whisper—"perhaps he's here now."

"We'll soon see that," said Tom Coney, plunging amid the laurels with a crash, and beating about with the stick.

But there was no trace of him. Tom came out presently, covered with the beaten snow, and we went indoors ; he bearing round partly to his first opinion, and a little incredulous in spite of the foot-prints.

"If any man was there, Johnny, how did he get away? I don't see, for my part, what he

could possibly want. A thief would have gone to work in a different manner."

"Well, let it be so. I shall say nothing about it to them when they come home. Mrs. Todhetley's timid, you know; she'd fancy the man was outside still, and be lying awake all night, listening for the smashing in of doors and windows."

Cracking the fire into a blaze; as much of a blaze, that is, as its dilapidated state allowed; I called Thomas to light the lamp and shut the shutters. When I told him of the affair, bidding him not mention it, he took a different view of it altogether, and put it down to the score of one of the younger maid-servants.

"They've got sweethearts, Master Johnny, the huzzies have; lots of sweethearts. One or the t'other of 'em is always a sidling sheepfaced up to the house, as though he didn't dare to say his legs was his own."

They came in from church before the fire had burnt up, and the Squire scolded me for letting it go so low. The coal we get in Worcestershire is the Staffordshire coal; it does not burn up in a minute as London coal does; it must have time.

Nothing of course was said about the man; I and Tom Coney—who stayed supper—held our tongues, as agreed upon. But I told Tod in going up to bed. He was sleepy, and did not think much of it. The fact was, as I could

plainly perceive, that to any of them, when related, it did not seem to be much. They had not seen it as I had.

Timberdale Rectory, a cosy, old-fashioned house, its front walls covered with ivy, stood by itself amid pasture-land, a field's length from the church. Mrs. Todhetley sent me there on the Monday morning, to invite the rector, Herbert Tanerton, and his wife to dine with us the next evening, for we had had a prime cod-fish sent as a present from London. The Squire and Tod had gone out shooting. It was January weather; cold and bright, with a frosty sky. Icicles drooped from the trees, and the snow in Crabb Ravine was above my ankles. The mater had said to me, "I should go the road-way, Johnny;" but I did not mind the snow.

In Timberdale I met Margaret Rymer. She had her black cloak on, and her natty little black bonnet; and the gentle and refined face under it, with its mild brown eyes, put me more than ever in mind of her dead father.

Does anybody remember her? I told something about her and her people in the first volume. When Thomas Rymer died, partly of cold on the chest, partly of a broken heart, Benjamin had again gone off, and Margaret continued to keep the business going. She

understood the drugs thoroughly. During all the months that had elapsed since, the son had not made his appearance at home. Timberdale would say, "Why does not Benjamin come back to carry on affairs in his father's place?" but it got no satisfactory answer. Latterly, Timberdale had let Benjamin alone, and busied itself with Margaret.

Six months ago, the Reverend Isaac Sale had come to Timberdale as curate. He was a plain, dark little man of sterling worth, and some thirty years of age—older than the Rector. Margaret Rymer met him at the Sunday School, where she taught regularly, and he fell desperately in love with her—if it's not wrong to say that of a parson. As a rule, men and women like contrasts; and perhaps the somewhat abrupt-mannered man with the plain and rugged features, had been irresistibly attracted by the delicate face of Margaret, and by her singularly gentle ways. In position she was not his equal; but Mr. Sale made no secret of his attachment, or that he wanted Margaret to be his wife. Mrs. Rymer entirely opposed it: how was the business to be kept going without Margaret, she demanded; or herself, either?

Mr. Sale had taken the curacy as a temporary thing. He was waiting for some expected appointment abroad. When it fell to him, Margaret Rymer would have to choose between sailing with him as his wife, or staying at home and

giving him up for good. So said Timberdale.

After standing to talk a bit with Margaret, who had come out on an errand for her mother, I ran on to the rectory. Mr. Tanerton and his wife were in the snug little bow-windowed front room. He, spare and colourless, young yet, with cold grey eyes and thin light whiskers, sat by the blazing fire of wood and coal, that went roaring and sparkling up the chimney. Somehow Herbert Tanerton gave you the idea of being always in a chill. Well meaning, and kind in the main, he was yet severe, taking too much note of offences, and expecting all the world, and especially his own flock, to be better than gold.

His wife, kind, genial, and open-hearted, sat at the window, stitching a wristband for one of her husband's new shirts—he was as particular over *them* as he was over the parish sins—and glancing cheerfully out between whiles at the snowy landscape. When she was Grace Coney, and niece at the farm, we were very intimate; a nice, merry-hearted, capable girl, rather tall and slender, with bright, dark hazel eyes, and a wide mouth that seemed always to be smiling to show its pretty white teeth. Seeing me coming, she ran to open the porch-door. As yet, she and Herbert had no children.

“Come in, Johnny! Is it not a lovely day? Herbert thinks it the coldest morning we have

had ; but I tell him that is because he does not feel very well. And he has been put out a little.”

“What about ?” I asked, as the Rector turned in his chair to shake hands with me. For she had said all that in his hearing.

“Oh, there are one or two things. Sam Mullett——”

“Where’s the use of talking of the stupid old man, Grace ?” cried the parson, crossly. “He is getting too old for his place.”

“And Mr. Sale is going to leave,” added Mrs. Tanerton, as I sat down by the table, after giving them the invitation. “The appointment he expected has been offered to him ; it is a chaplaincy at the Bahama Islands. Mr. Sale has known of it for a week, and never told Herbert until yesterday.”

“He spoke to me in the vestry after morning service,” said the Rector, in an injured tone. “And he said at the same time that he was not sure he should accept it ; it did not quite depend upon himself. I saw as clearly what he meant to imply as though he had avowed it ; that it depended upon that girl, Margaret Rymer. It is a preposterous thing. The idea of a clergyman and a gentleman wanting to marry *her* ! She keeps a chemist’s shop !”

“It was her father who kept it,” I said eagerly, for I liked Margaret Rymer, and did not care to hear her disparaged. “And he was a gentleman born.”

“What has that to do with it?” retorted the parson, who was in one of his most touchy humours. “Had her grandfather been a duke, it would make no difference to what she is. Look at the mother!”

“Margaret is a lady in mind, in looks, and in manners,” I persisted. “If I loved Margaret Rymer I would marry her, though I were an archdeacon.”

“That’s just like you, Johnny Ludlow! you have no more sense than a child in some things,” said the parson, crustily. Grace glanced up from her work and laughed; and looked as if she would like to take part with me.

“I never could have suspected Sale of such folly,” went on the Rector, leaning sideways to warm his hands over the blaze. “Grace, do you think that soup’s ready?”

“I will see,” answered Grace, putting the wristband on the little work-table; and she touched my shoulder playfully in passing.

Herbert Tanerton sat in silence; knitting his brow into lines. I took the chair on the other side the fire-place opposite to him, thinking of this and that, and fingering the tongs to help me: a habit I was often scolded for at home—that of fingering things.

“Look here, Mr. Tanerton. If they go all the way out to settle at the Bahamas, it will not signify there who Margaret has been here. Whether she may have helped in her father’s

business, or whether she may have been—as you said—a duke’s grand-daughter, and brought up accordingly, it will be all one to the Bahamas. Mr. Sale need not say to the Bahamas, ‘My wife used to sell pennyworths of rhubarb and magnesia.’ ”

“It is not that,” crossly responded the Rector —“what people will think or say ; it is for Sale’s own sake that I object. He cannot like the connection. A clergyman should marry in his own sphere.”

“I suppose men are differently constituted, clergymen as well as others,” said I with deprecation, remembering that I was a plain inexperienced lad, and he was the Rector of Timberdale. Some persons don’t care for social distinctions as others do, don’t even see them : perhaps Mr. Sale is one.”

“He cares for probity and honour—he would not choose to ally himself to crime, to disgrace,” sternly spoke the Rector. “And he would do that in marrying Margaret Rymer. Remember what the son did, that ill-doing Benjamin,” added he, dropping his voice. “You know all about it, Johnny. The affair of the bank-note, I mean.”

And if Herbert Tanerton had said to me the affair of the moon and planets, I could not have been more surprised. “How did you get to know of it ?” I asked, when speech came to me.

“Mr. Rymer told me on his death-bed. I

was attending him spiritually. Of course, I have never spoken of it, even to my wife—I should not think of speaking of it; but I consider that it lies in my duty to disclose the facts to Mr. Sale.”

“Oh no, don’t—don’t, please, Mr. Tanerton!” I cried out, starting up in a sort of distress, for the words seemed to take hold of me. “No one knows of it: no one but the Squire, and I, as you say, and Mrs. Rymer, and you, and Ben himself; Jelf’s dead, you know. It need never be brought up again in this world; and I dare say it never will be. Pray don’t tell Mr. Sale—for Margaret’s sake.”

“But I have said that I consider it my duty to tell him,” replied the parson, steadily. “Here he comes!”

I turned to the window, and saw Sale trudging up to the parsonage through the snowy field pathway, his black hair and red rugged face presenting a kind of contrast to the white glare around. Ugly, he might be called; but it was a face to be liked, for all that. And the ring of his voice was true and earnest.

The affair of the bank-note had helped to kill Thomas Rymer, and sent Mr. Ben off on his wanderings again. It was a bit of ill-luck for Ben, for he had really pulled up, was reading hard at his medical books, and become as steady as could be. Never since then—some ten months ago now—had Ben been heard of;

never had it been spoken of to man or woman. *Need* Herbert Tanerton disclose it to the curate? No: and I did not think he'd do it.

"We were just talking of you," was the Rector's greeting to Mr. Sale as the curate came into the room. "Bring a chair to the front of the fire: Johnny, keep your seat. I'm sure it's cold enough to make one wish to be in the fire to-day, instead of before it."

"What were you saying about me?" asked Mr. Sale, drawing forward the chair to sit down, as bidden, and giving me a nod in his short way.

"Have you come to tell me your decision—to go or stay?" asked the Rector, neglecting to answer the question.

"Not this morning. My decision is not yet made. I came to tell you how very ill Jael Batty is. I'm not at all sure that she will get over this bout."

"Oh," said the Rector, in a slighting tone, as if Jael Batty had no right to intrude herself into more momentous conversation. "Jael Batty is careless and indifferent in her duties, anything but what she ought to be, and makes her deafness an excuse for not coming to church. I'll try and get out to see her in the course of the day. She is always having these attacks. What we were speaking of was your friendship with Miss Rymer.

Herbert Tanerton, as I have said, meant to be kind, and I believe he had people's welfare

at heart ; but he had a severe way of saying things that seemed to take all the kindness out of his words. He was a great stickler for "duty," and if once he considered it was his duty to tell a fellow of his faults, tell he did, face to face, in the most uncompromising manner. He had decided that it was his duty to hold forth to Mr. Sale, and he plunged into the discourse without ceremony. The curate did not seem in the least put out, but talked back again, quietly and freely. I sat balancing the tongs over the fender and listening.

"Miss Rymer is not my equal, you say," observed Sale. "I don't know that. Her father was a curate's son : I am a curate's son. Circumstances, it would seem, kept Mr. Rymer down in the world. Perhaps they will keep me down—I cannot tell."

"But you are a gentleman in position, a clergyman : Rymer served customers," retorted Mr. Tanerton, harping upon that *bête noire* of his, the chemist's shop. "Can't you perceive the difference ? A gentleman ought to be a gentleman."

"Thomas Rymer was a gentleman, as I hear, in mind and manners and conduct ; educated, courteous, and——"

"He was one of the truest gentlemen ever met," I could not help putting in, though it interrupted the curate. "For my part, when

speaking with him I forgot the counter he served at."

"And a true Christian, I was about to say," added Mr. Sale.

There was a pause. Herbert Tanerton, who had been fidgeting in his chair, spoke :

"Am I mistaken in assuming that your acceptance of this chaplaincy depends upon Miss Rymer?"

"No, you are not mistaken," said Sale, readily. "It does depend upon her. If she will go with me—my wife—I shall accept it; if she will not, I remain at home."

"Margaret is as nice as her father was; she is exactly like him," I said. "Were I you, Mr. Sale, I should just take her out of the place and end it."

"But if she won't come with me?" returned he with a half smile.

"She is wanted at home," observed Herbert Tanerton, casting a severe look at me with his cold light eyes. "That shop could not get on without her." But Sale interrupted.

"I cannot imagine why the son is not at home to attend to things. It is his place to be there doing it, not his sister's. He is inclined to be wild, it is said, and given to roving."

"Wildness is not Benjamin Rymer's worst fault, or roving either," cried the Rector in his hardest voice, though he dropped it to a low key. And forthwith he opened the ball, and

told the unfortunate story in a very few words. I let fall the tongs with a clatter.

"I would not have mentioned this," pursued he, "but that I consider it lies in my duty to tell you of it. To anyone else it would never be allowed to pass my lips ; it never has passed them since Mr. Rymer disclosed it to me a day or two before he died. Margaret Rymer may be desirable in herself ; but there's her position, and—there's *this*. It is for your own sake I have spoken, Mr. Sale."

Sale had sat still and quiet while he listened. There was nothing outward to show that the tale affected him, but instinct told me that it *did*. Just a question or two he put, as to the details, and then he rose to leave.

"Will you not let it sway you?" asked the Rector, perseveringly, as he held out his hand to his curate. And I was sure he thought he had been doing him the greatest good in the world.

"I cannot tell," replied Mr. Sale.

He went out, walked across the garden, and through the gate to the field, with his head down. A dreadful listlessness—as it seemed to me—had taken the place of his brisk bearing. Just for a minute I stood in the parlour where I was, feeling as though I had had a shower of ice thrown down upon me and might never be warm again. Saying a short good-morning, I rushed out after him, nearly upsetting Mrs. Tanerton

in the hall, and a basin of soup she was carrying in on a plate. How cruel it seemed ; how cruel ! Why can't people let one another alone ? He was half-way across the field when I overtook him.

“ Mr. Sale, I want to tell you—I ought to tell you—that the story, as repeated to you by Mr. Tanerton, bears a worse aspect than the reality would warrant. It is true that Benjamin Rymer did change the note in the letter ; but that was the best and the worst of it. He had become mixed up with some reckless men when at Tewkesbury, and they persuaded him to get the stolen note changed for a safe one. I am sure he repented of it truly. When he came home later to his father's, he had left all his random ways and bad companions behind him. Nobody could be steadier than he was : kind to Margaret, considerate to his father and mother, attentive to business, and reading hard all his spare time. It was only through an ill fellow coming here to hunt him up—one Cotton, who was the man that induced him to play the trick with the note—that he was disturbed again.”

“ How disturbed ? ”

“ He grew frightened, I mean, and went away. That fellow Cotton deserved hanging. When he found that Ben Rymer would have nothing more to do with him, or with the rest of the bad lot, he, in revenge, told Jelf, the landlord of the Plough and Harrow (where

Cotton ran up a score, and decamped without paying), saying that it was Ben Rymer who had changed the note—for, you see, it had always remained a mystery to Timberdale. Jelf—he is dead now—was foolish enough to let Ben Rymer know what Cotton had said, and Ben made off in alarm. In a week's time Mr. Rymer was dead. He had been ailing in mind and body for a long while, and the new fear finished him up."

A pause ensued. Sale broke it. "Did Miss Rymer know of this?"

"Of Ben and the bank-note? I don't believe she knows of it to this hour."

"No, I feel sure she does not," added Sale, speaking more to himself than to me. "She is truth and candour itself; and she has repeatedly said to me she cannot tell why her brother keeps away; cannot imagine why."

"You see," I went on, "no one knows of it, save myself, but Squire Todhetley and Mr. Tanerton. We should never, never think of bringing it up, any one of us; Mr. Tanerton only spoke of it, as he said, because he thought he ought to tell you; he will never speak of it again. Indeed, Mr. Sale, you need not fear it will be known. Benjamin Rymer is quite safe."

"What sort of a man is he, this Benjamin?" resumed Sale, halting at the outer gate of the field as we were going through it. "Like the father, or like the mother?"

“ Like the mother. But not as vulgar as she is. Ben has been educated ; she was not : and though he does take after her, there’s a little bit of his father in him as well. Which makes a great difference.”

Without another word, Mr. Sale turned abruptly off to the right, as though he were going for a country ramble. I shut the gate, and made the best of my way home, bearing back the message from the Rector and Grace—that they’d come and help eat the codfish.

The Reverend Isaac Sale was that day sorely exercised in mind. The story he had heard shook his equanimity to the centre. To marry a young lady whose brother stood a chance of being prosecuted for felony, looked like a very black prospect indeed ; but, on the other hand, Margaret at least was innocent, and he loved and respected her with his whole heart and soul. Not until the evening was his mind made up ; he had debated the question with himself in all its bearings (seated on the stump of a snowy tree) ; and the decision he arrived at, was—to take Margaret all the same. He *could not* leave her.

About nine o’clock he went to Mrs. Rymer’s. The shop was closed, and Mr. Sale entered by the private door. Margaret sat in the parlour alone, reading ; Mrs. Rymer was out. In her soft black dress with its bit of white frilling at the throat, Margaret did not look anything like

her nearly twenty years. Her mild brown eyes and tale-telling cheeks lighted up at the entrance of the curate. Letting her nervous little hand meet his strong one, she would have drawn a chair forward for him, but he kept her standing by him on the hearth-rug.

"I am come this evening to have some final conversation with you, Margaret, and I am glad your mother is out," he began. "Will you hear me, my dear?"

"You know I am always glad to hear you," she said, in a low, timid tone. And Mr. Sale made no more ado, but turned and kissed her. Then he released her hand, sat down opposite to her on the other side of the hearth, and entered on his argument.

It was no more, no other, than she had heard from him before—the whole sum and substance of it consisted of representations why he must accept this chaplaincy at the Bahamas, and why she must accompany him thither. In the midst of it Margaret burst into tears.

"Oh, Isaac, why prolong the pain?" she said. "You know I *cannot* go: to refuse is as painful to me as to you. Don't you see that I have no alternative but to remain here?"

"No, I do not see it," replied Mr. Sale, stoutly. "I think your mother could do without you. She is an active, bustling woman, hardly to be called middle-aged yet. It is not right that you should sacrifice yourself and your

prospects in life. At least, it seems to me that it is not."

Margaret's hand was covering her face; the silent tears dropped through her fingers. To see him depart, leaving her behind, was a prospect intensely bitter. Her heart ached when she thought of it: but she saw no hope of its being otherwise.

"It is a week and a day since I told you that the promotion was at length offered me," resumed Mr. Sale, "and we seem to be not any nearer a decision than we were then. I have kept it to myself and said nothing about it abroad, waiting for you to speak to me, Margaret; and the Rector—to whom I at length spoke yesterday—is angry with me, and says I ought to have told him at once. In three days from this—on Thursday next—I *must* give an answer: accept the post, or throw it up."

Margaret took her hand from her face. Mr. Sale could see how great was the conflict at work within her.

"There is nothing to wait for, Isaac. I wish there was. You must go by yourself, and leave me."

"I have told you that I will not. If you stay here, I stay."

"Oh, pray don't do that! It would be so intense a disappointment to you to give it up."

"The greatest disappointment I have ever

had in life," he answered. "You must go with me."

"I wish I could! I wish I could! But it is impossible. My duty lies here, Isaac. I wish you could see that fact as strongly as I see it. My poor father always enjoined me to do my duty, no matter at what personal cost.

"It is your brother's duty to be here, Margaret; not yours. Where is he?"

"In London, I believe," she replied, and a faint colour flew into her pale face. She put up her handkerchief to hide it.

It had come to Margaret's knowledge that during the past few months her mother had occasionally written to Benjamin. But Mrs. Rymer would not allow Margaret to write or give her his address. It chanced, however, that about a fortnight ago Mrs. Rymer incautiously left a letter on the table, addressed to him, and her daughter saw it. When, some days subsequently, Mr. Sale received the offer of the chaplaincy, and laid it and himself before Margaret, urging her to accompany him, saying that he could not go without her, she took courage to write to Benjamin. She did not ask him to return and release her; she only asked him whether he had any intention of returning, and, if so, when; and she gave him in simple words the history of her acquaintanceship with Mr. Sale, and said that he wanted her to go out with him to the Bahamas. To this letter Margaret had not

received any answer. She therefore concluded that it had either not reached her brother, or else that he did not mean to return at all to Timberdale; and so she gave up all hopes of it.

“Life is not very long, Margaret, and God has placed us in it to do the best we can in all ways; for Him first, for social obligations afterwards. But He has not meant it to be all trial, all self-denial. If you and I part now, the probability is that we part for ever. Amid the world’s chances and changes we may never meet again, howsoever much our wills might prompt it.”

“True,” she faintly answered.

“And I say that you ought not to enforce this weighty penance upon me and yourself. It is for your brother’s sake, as I look upon it, that you are making the sacrifice, and it is he, not you, who ought to be here. Why did he go away?”

“I never knew,” said Margaret, lifting her eyes to her lover’s, and speaking so confidently and earnestly that, had he needed proof to convince him she was ignorant of the story he had that day been regaled with, it would have amply afforded it. “Benjamin was at home, and so steady and good as to be a comfort to papa; when quite suddenly he left without giving a reason. Papa seemed to be in trouble about it—it was but a few days before he died—and I have thought that perhaps poor Benjamin was

unexpectedly called upon to pay some debt or other, and could not find the money to do it. He had not always been quite so steady."

"Well, Margaret, I think——"

A loud bang of the entrance-door, and a noisy burst into the room, proclaimed the return of Mrs. Rymer. Her mass of scarlet curls garnished her face on either side, like a couple of drooping bushes, looking particularly incongruous with her widow's cap and bonnet. Mr. Sale, rising to hand her a chair, broke off what he had been about to say to Margaret, and addressed Mrs. Rymer instead; simply saying that the decision, as to her going out with him, or not going, could no longer be put off, but must be made.

"It has been made," returned Mrs. Rymer, disregarding the offered chair, and standing to hold her boots, one after the other, to the fire. "Margaret can't go, Mr. Sale; you know it."

"But I wish her to go, and she wishes it."

"It's a puzzle to me what on earth you can see in her," cried Mrs. Rymer, flinging her grey muff on the table, and untying her black bonnet-strings to tilt the bonnet half-way off her head. Margaret won't have any money. Not a penny piece."

"I am not thinking about money," replied the curate; who somehow could never keep his temper long in the presence of this strong-minded Amazon. "It is Margaret that I want; not money."

“And it’s Margaret, then, that you can’t have,” she retorted. “Who is to keep the shop on if she leaves it?—it can’t go to rack and ruin.”

“I see you serving in it yourself sometimes.”

“I can serve the stationery—and the pickles and fish sauce—and the pearl barley,” contended she, “but not the drugs. I don’t meddle with them. When a prescription comes in to be made up, if I attempted to do it I might put opium for senna, and poison people. I have not learnt Latin, as Margaret has.”

“But, Mrs. Rymer——”

“Now we’ll just drop the subject, sir, if it’s all the same to you,” loudly put in Mrs. Rymer. “I have told you before that Margaret must stay where she is, and keep the business together for me and her brother. No need to repeat it fifty times over.”

She caught up her muff, and went out of the room and up the stairs as she delivered this final edict. Mr. Sale rose.

“You see how it is,” said Margaret, in a low tone of emotion, and keeping her eyelids down to hide the tears. “You must go without me. I cannot leave. I can only say, God speed you.”

“There are many wrongs enacted in this world, and this is one,” he replied in a hard voice—not hard for her—as he took her hands in his, and stood before her. “I don’t know that I altogether blame you, Margaret ; but it

is cruel upon you and upon me. Good-night."

He went out quite abruptly without kissing her, leaving her alone with her aching heart.

Tuesday afternoon, and the ice and the snow on the ground still. We were to dine at five o'clock—off the London codfish and a prime turkey—and the Coneys were coming in as well as the Rector and his wife.

But Mrs. Coney did not come ; old Coney and Tom brought in word that she was not feeling well enough ; and the Tanertons only drove up on the stroke of five. As I helped Grace down from the pony-chaise, muffled up to the chin in furs, for the cold was enough to freeze an Icelanders' nose off, I told her her aunt was not well enough to come.

"Aunt Coney not well enough to come!" returned Grace. "What a pity! Have I time to run in to see her before dinner, Johnny?"

"That you've not. You are late, as it is. The Squire has been telling us all that the codfish must be in rags already."

Grace laughed as she ran in ; her husband followed her, unwinding the folds of his white woollen comforter. There was a general greeting and much laughter, especially when old Coney told Grace that her cheeks were as purple

as his Sunday necktie. In the midst of it Thomas announced dinner.

The codfish came up all right, and the oyster sauce was in Molly's best style—made of cream, and plenty of oysters in it. The turkey was fine : the plum-pudding better than good. Hugh and Lena sat at the table ; and altogether we had a downright merry dinner. Not a sober face among us, save Herbert Tanerton's : as to his face—well, you might have thought he was perpetually saying “ For what we are going to receive——” It had struck eight ever so long when the last nut was eaten.

“ Will you run over with me to my aunt's, Johnny ?” whispered Grace, as she passed my chair. “ I should like to go at once, if you will.”

So I followed her out of the room. She put her wraps on, and we went trudging across the road in the moonlight, over the crunching snow. Grace's foot went into a soft rut, and she gave a squeal.

“ I shall have to borrow a shoe while this dries,” said she. “ Do you care to come in, Johnny ?”

“ No, I'll go back. I can run over for you presently.”

“ Don't do that. One of the servants will see me safe across.”

“ All right. Tell Mrs. Coney what a jolly dinner it was. We were all sorry she did not come.”

Grace went in and shut the door. I was rushing back through our own gate, when some tall fellow glided out of the laurels, and put his hand on my arm. The moonlight fell full upon his face and its mass of reddish beard—and, to my intense surprise, I recognised Benjamin Rymer. I knew him then for the man who had been dodging in and out of the shrubs the night but one before.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “It is, as I am well aware, a very unusual and uncere-
monious way of accosting you, or anyone else, but I want particularly to speak with you, in private, Mr. Ludlow.”

“You were here on Sunday night!”

“Yes. I saw the Squire and the rest of them go out to church, but I did not see you go, and I was trying to ascertain whether you were at home and alone. Tom Coney’s coming in startled me and sent me away.”

We had been speaking in a low key, but Ben Rymer dropped his to a lower, as he explained. When he went away ten months before, it was in fear and dread that the truth of the escapade he had been guilty of, in regard to the bank-note, was coming out to the world, and that he might be called upon to answer for it. His mother had since assured him he had nothing to fear; but Ben was evidently a cautious man, and preferred to ascertain that fact before showing himself openly at Timberdale. Know-

ing I was to be trusted not to injure a fellow (as he was pleased to say), he had come down here to ask me my opinion as to whether the Squire would harm him, or not. There was no one else to fear now Jelf was dead.

“Harm you !” I exclaimed in my enthusiasm, my head full of poor, patient Margaret ; “why, the Squire would be the very one to hold you free of harm, Mr. Rymer. I remember his saying, at the time, Heaven forbid that he, having sons of his own, should put a stumbling-block in your path, when you were intending to turn over a new leaf. He will help you on, instead of harming you.”

“It’s very good of him,” said Ben. “I was an awful fool, and nothing else. That was the only dangerous thing I ever did, and I have been punished severely for it. I believe it was nothing but the fear and remorse it brought that induced me to pull up, and throw ill ways behind me.”

“I’m sure I am glad that you do,” I answered, for something in Ben’s tone seemed to imply that the bad ways were thrown behind him for good. “Are you thinking of coming back to Timberdale ?”

“Until I shall have passed for a surgeon—which will not be long now. I have been with a surgeon in London as assistant, since I left here. It was a letter from Margaret that induced me to come down. She—do you know anything about her, Mr. Johnny ?”

"I know that a parson wants her to go out with him to the Bahamas; he is Tanerton's curate; and that the pills and powders stand in the way of it."

"Just so. Is he a good fellow, this parson?"

"Good in himself. Not much to look at."

"Maggie shall go with him, then. I should be the last to stand willingly in her way. You see, I have not known whether it was safe for me at Timberdale: or I should never have left Maggie to the shop alone. Does anyone know of the past—my past—besides you and the Squire?"

"Yes; Herbert Tanerton knows of it; and—and the curate, Mr. Sale." And I told him what had passed only on the previous day, softening the Rector's speeches—and it seemed a curious coincidence, taken with this visit of Ben's, that it should have passed. His mouth fell as he listened.

"It is another mortification for me," he said. "I should like to have stood as well as might be with Margaret's husband. Perhaps knowing this, he will not think more of her."

"I don't believe he will let it make any difference. I don't think he is the man to let it. Perhaps—if you were to go to him—and show him how straight things are with you now—and——"

"I broke down in my hesitating suggestion.

Ben was years older than I, miles taller and broader, and it sounded like the mouse attempting to help the lion.

"Yes, I will go to him," he said slowly. "It is the only plan. And—and you think there's no fear that Herbert Tanerton will get talking to others?"

"I'm sure there's none. He is indoors now, dining with us. I am sure you are quite safe in all respects. The thing is buried in the past, and even its remembrance will pass away. The old postman, Lee, thinks it was Cotton; the Squire persuaded him into the belief at the time. Where *is* Cotton?"

"Where all such rogues deserve to be—transported. But for him and his friends I should never have done much that's wrong. Thank you for the encouragement you give."

He half put out his hand to endorse the thanks, and drew it back, again; but I put mine freely into his. Ben Rymer *was* Ben Rymer, and no favourite of mine to boot; but when a man has been down and is trying to get up again, he deserves respect and sympathy.

"I was about here all last evening, hoping to get sight of you," he remarked, as he went out at the gate. "I never saw such light nights in all my life as these few last have been, what with the moon and the snow. Good-night, Mr. Johnny.—By the way, though, where does the curate live?"

“At Mrs. Boughton’s. Nearly the last house, you know, before you come to the churchyard.”

Ben Rymer went striding towards Timberdale, putting his coat-collar well up, that he might not be recognised when going through the village, and arrived at the curate’s lodgings. Mr. Sale was at home, sitting by the fire in a brown study, that seemed to have no light at all in it. Ben, as I knew later, sat down by him, and made a clean breast of everything: his temptation, his fall, and his later endeavours to do right.

“Please God, I shall get on in the world now,” he said; “and I think make a name in my profession. I don’t wish to boast—and time of course will alone prove it—but I believe I have a special aptitude for surgery. My mother will be my care now; and Margaret—as you are good enough to say you still wish for her—shall be your care in future. There are few girls so deserving as she is.”

“I know that,” said the curate. And he shook Ben’s hand upon it as heartily as though it had been a duke royal’s.

It was close upon ten when Ben left him. Mrs. Rymer about that same time was making her usual preparations before retiring—namely putting her curls in paper by the parlour fire. Margaret sat at the table, reading the Bible in silence, and so trying to school her aching heart. Her mother had been cross and trying all the

evening : which did not mend the inward pain.

“What are you crying for?” suddenly demanded Mrs. Rymer, her sharp eyes seeing a tear fall on the book.

“For nothing,” faintly replied Margaret.

“*Nothing!* Don’t tell me. You are frizzling your bones over that curate, Sale. I’m sure *he* is a beauty to look at.”

Margaret made no rejoinder ; and just then the young servant put in her head.

“Be there aught else wanted, missis?”

“No,” snapped Mrs. Rymer. “You can be off to bed.”

But, before the girl had shut the parlour door, a loud ring came to the outer one. Such late summonses were not unusual ; they generally meant a prescription to be made up. While the girl went to the door, Margaret closed the Bible, dried her eyes, and rose up to be in readiness.

But instead of a prescription, there entered Mr. Benjamin Rymer. His mother stood up, staring, her hair a mass of white corkscrews. Ben clasped Margaret in his arms, and kissed her heartily.

“My goodness *me!*” cried Mrs. Rymer. “Is it you, Ben?”

“Yes, it is, mother,” said Ben, turning to her. “Maggie dear, you look as though you did not know me.”

“Why, what on earth have you come for, in

this startling way?" demanded Mrs. Rymer. "I don't believe your bed's aired."

"I'll sleep between the blankets—the best place to-night. What have I come for, you ask, mother; I have come home to stay."

Margaret was gazing at him, her mild eyes wide open, a spot of crimson hectic on either cheek.

"For your sake, Maggie," he whispered, putting his arm round her waist, and bending his great red head (but not so red as his mother's) down on her. "I shall not much like to lose you, though, my little sister. The Bahamas are farther off than I could have wished."

And, for answer, poor Margaret, what with one thing and another, sank quietly down in her chair, and fainted. Ben strode into the shop—as much at home amid the bottles as though he had never quitted them—and came back with some *sal volatile*.

They were married in less than a month; for Mr. Sale's chaplaincy would not wait for him. The Rector was ailing as usual, or said he was, and Charles Ashton came over to perform the ceremony. Margaret was in a bright dark silk, a light shawl, and a plain bonnet: they were to go away from the church door, and the boxes were already at the station. Ben, dressed well, and looking not unlike a gentleman, gave her

away ; but there was no wedding-party. Mrs. Rymer stayed at home in a temper ; which I dare say nobody regretted : she considered Margaret ought to have remained single. And after a day or two spent in the seaport town they were to sail from, regaling their eyes with the ships crowding the water, the Reverend Isaac Sale and his wife embarked for their future home in the Bahama Isles.

V.

THE OTHER EARRING.

“AND if I could make sure that you two boys would behave yourselves and give me no trouble, possibly I might take you this year, just for a treat.”

“Behave ourselves!” exclaimed Tod, indignantly resentful. “Do you think we are two children, sir?”

“We would be as good as gold, sir,” I added, turning eagerly to the Squire.

“Well, Johnny, I’m not much afraid but that you would. Perhaps I’ll trust you both, then, Joe.”

“Thank you, father.”

“I shall see,” added the Pater, thinking it well to put in a little qualification. “It’s not quite a promise, mind. But it must be two or three years now, I think, since you went to them.”

“It seems like six,” said Tod. “I know it’s four.”

We were talking of Worcester Races. At that

period they used to take place early in August. Dr. Frost had an unpleasant habit of reassembling his pupils either the race week or the previous one ; and to get over to the races was nearly as difficult for Tod and for me as though they had been run in California. To hear the Pater say he might perhaps take us this year, just as the Midsummer holidays were drawing to an end, and say it voluntarily, was as good as it was unexpected. He meant it, too ; in spite of the added reservation : and Dr. Frost was warned that he need not expect us until the race week was at its close.

The Squire drove into Worcester on the Monday, to be ready for the races on Tuesday morning, with Tod, myself, and the groom—Giles ; and put up, as usual, at the Star and Garter. Sometimes he only drove in and back on each of the three race days ; or perhaps on two of them : this he could do very well from Crabb Cot, but it was a good pull for the horses from Dyke Manor. This year, to our intense gratification, he meant to stay in the town.

The Faithful City was already in a bustle. It had put on its best appearance, and had its windows cleaned : some of the shop-fronts were being polished off as we drove slowly up the streets. Families were, like ourselves, coming in : more would come before night. The theatre was open, and we went to it after dinner ; and saw, I remember, “Guy Mannering” (over which

the Pater went to sleep), and an after-piece with a ghost in it.

The next morning I took the nearest way from the hotel to Sansome Walk, and went up it to call on one of our fellows who lived near the top. His friends always let him stay at home for the race week. A servant-maid came running to answer my knock at the door.

"Is Harry Parker at home?"

"No, sir," answered the girl, who seemed to be cleaning up for the races on her own account, for her face and arms were all colly. "Master Harry have gone down to Pitchcroft, I think."

"I hope he has gone early enough!" said I, feeling disappointed. "Why, the races won't begin for hours yet."

"Well, sir," she said, "I suppose there's a deal more life to be seen there than here, though it is early in the day."

That might easily be. For of all solitary places Sansome Walk was, in those days, the dreariest, especially portions of it. What with the overhanging horse-chestnut trees, and the high dead wall behind those on the one hand, and the flat stretch of lonely fields on the other, Sansome Walk was what Harry Parker used to call a caution. You might pass through all its long length from end to end and never meet a soul.

Taking that narrow by-path on my way back that leads into the Tything by St. Oswald's

Chapel, and whistling a bar of the sweet song I had heard at the theatre over night, "There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream," somebody came swiftly advancing down the same narrow path, and I prepared to back sideways to give her room to pass—a young woman with a large shabby shawl on, and the remains of faded gentility about her.

It was Lucy Bird! As she drew near, lifting her sad sweet eyes to mine with a mournful smile, my heart gave a great throb of pity. Faded, worn, anxious, reduced!—oh, how unlike she was, poor girl, to the once gay and charming Lucy Ashton!"

"Why, Lucy! I did not expect to see you in Worcester! We heard you had left it months ago."

"Yes, we left last February for London," she answered. "Captain Bird has only come down for the races."

As she took her hand from underneath her shawl to respond to mine, I saw that she was carrying some cheese and a paper of cold cooked meat. She must have been buying the meat at the cook's shop, as the Worcester people called it, which was in the middle of High Street. Oh! what a change—what a change for the delicately-bred Lucy Ashton! Better that her Master of Ravenswood had buried his horse and himself in the flooded land, as the other one did, than have brought her to this.

"Where are you going to, down this dismal place, Lucy?"

"Home," she answered. "We have taken lodgings at the top of Sansome Walk."

"At one of the cottages a little beyond it?"

"Yes, at one of those. How are you all, Johnny? How is Mrs. Todhetley?"

"Oh, she's first-rate. Got no neuralgia just now."

"Is she at Worcester?"

"No, at Dyke Manor. She would not come. The Squire drove us in yesterday. We are at the Star."

"Ah! yes," she said, her eyes taking a dreamy, far-off look. "I remember staying at the Star myself one race week. Papa brought me. It was the year I left school."

How things were altered with her! Carrying home papers of cheese and cooked meat!

"Have you heard or seen anything of my brothers lately, Johnny Ludlow?"

"Not since we were last staying at Crabb Cot. We went to Timberdale Church one day and heard your brother Charles preach; and we dined once with Robert at the Court, and he and his wife came once to dine with us. But—have you not seen your brother James here?"

"No—and I would rather not see him. He would be sure to ask me painful questions."

"But he is always about the streets here, see—

ing after his patients, Lucy. I wonder you have not met him."

"We only came down last Saturday : and I go out as little as I can," she said ; a kind of evasiveness—or rather, perhaps, hesitation—in her tone and manner that struck me. "I did think I saw James's carriage before me just now as I came up the Tything. It turned into Britannia Square."

"I dare say. We met it yesterday in Sidbury as we drove in."

"His practice gets large, I suppose. You say Charles was preaching at Timberdale?" she added : "was Herbert Tanerton ill?"

"Yes. Ailing, that is. Your brother came over to take the duty for the day. Will you call at the Star to see the Squire, Lucy? You know how pleased he would be."

"N—o," she answered, her manner still more hesitating, just as though she were in a peck of inward doubt ; and she seemed to be debating some matter mentally. "I—I would have come after dark, had Mrs. Todhetley been there. At least I think I would—I don't know."

"You can come all the same, Lucy."

"But no—that would not have done," she went on to herself, in a half whisper. "I might have been seen. It would never have done to risk it. The truth is, Johnny, I ought to see Mrs. Todhetley on a matter of business. Though even if she were here, I do not know

that I might dare to see her. It is—not exactly my own business—and—and mischief might come of it.”

“Is it anything I can say to her for you?”

“I—think—you might,” she returned slowly, pausing, as before, between her words. “I know you are to be trusted, Johnny.”

“That I am. I’d not forget a single item of the message.”

“I did not mean in that way. I shall have to entrust to you a private matter—a disagreeable secret. It is a long while that I have wanted to tell some of you; ever since last winter: and yet, now that the opportunity has come that I may do it, I scarcely dare. The Squire is hasty and impulsive, his son is proud; but I think I may confide in you, Johnny.”

“Only try me, Lucy.”

“Well, I will. *I will*. I know you are true as steel. Not this morning, for I cannot stop—and I am not prepared. Let me see: where shall we meet again? No, no, Johnny, I cannot venture to the hotel: it is of no use to suggest that.”

“Shall I come to your lodgings?”

She just shook her head by way of dissent, and remained in silent thought. I could not imagine what it was she had to tell me that required all this preparation; but it came into my mind to be glad that I had chanced to go that morning to Harry Parker’s.

"Suppose you meet me in Sansome Walk this afternoon, Johnny Ludlow? Say at"—considering—"yes, at four o'clock. That will be a safe hour, for they will be on the racecourse and out of the way. People will, I mean," she added hastily: but somehow I did not think she had meant people. "Can you come?"

"I will manage it."

"And, if you don't meet me at that time—it is just possible that I may be prevented coming out—I will be there at eight o'clock this evening instead," she continued. "That I know I can do."

"Very well. I'll be sure to be there."

Hardly waiting another minute to say good-morning, she went swiftly on. I began wondering what excuse I could make for leaving the Squire's carriage in the midst of the sport, and whether he would let me leave it.

But the way for that was paved without any effort of mine. At the early lunch, the Squire, in the openness of his heart, offered a seat in the phaeton to some old acquaintance from Martley. Which of course would involve Tod's sitting behind with me, and Giles's being left out altogether.

"Catch me at it!" cried Tod. "You can do as you please, Johnny: I shall go to the course on foot."

"I will also," I said—though you, naturally, understand that I had never expected to sit

elsewhere than behind. And I knew it would be easier for me to lose Tod in the crowd, and so get away to keep the appointment, than it would have been to elude the Squire's questioning as to why I could want to leave the carriage.

Lunch over, Tod said he would go to the Bell, to see whether the Letsoms had come in ; and we started off. No ; the waiter had seen nothing of them. Onwards, down Broad Street we went, took the Quai, and so got on that way to Pitchcroft—as the racecourse is called. The booths and shows were at this end, and the chief part of the crowd. Before us lay stretched the long expanse of the course, green and level as a bowling-green. The grand-stand (comparatively speaking a new erection there) lay on the left, higher up, the winning-chair and distance-post facing it. Behind the stand, flanking all that side of Pitchcroft, the beautiful river Severn flowed along between its green banks, the houses of Henwick, opposite, looking down upon it from their great height, over their sloping gardens. It was a hot day, the blue sky dark and cloudless.

“ True and correct card of all the running horses, gentlemen : the names, weights, and colours o' the riders ! ” The shouted-out words, echoing on all sides from the men who held these cards for sale, are repeated in my brain now ; as are other sounds and sights. I was somewhat older then than I had been ; but it

was not so very long since those shows, ranged around there side by side, a long line of them, held the greatest attraction for me in life. "Guy Mannering," the past night, had been very nice to see, very enjoyable; but it possessed not the nameless charm of that first "play" I went to in Scowton's Show on the racecourse. *That* charm could never come again. And I was but a lad yet.

The lightning with which the play opened had been real lightning to me; the thunder, real thunder. The gentleman who stood, when the curtain rose, gorgeously attired in a scarlet doublet slashed with gold (something between a king and a bandit), with uplifted face of terror and drawn sword, calling the war of the elements "tremendous," was to me a greater potentate than nearly the world could contain! The young lady, his daughter, in ringlets and spangles, who came flying on in the midst of the storm, and fell at his feet with upraised arms and a piteous appeal, "Alas! my father, and will you not consent to my marriage with Alphonso?" seemed more lovely to me than the Sultanas in the "Arabian Nights," or the Princesses in Fairyland. I sat there entranced and speechless. A new world had opened to me—a world of delight. For weeks and weeks afterwards, that play, with its wondrous beauties, its shifting scenes, was present to me sleeping and waking.

The ladies in spangles, the gentlemen in slashed doublets, were on the platforms of their respective shows to-day, dancing for the benefit of Pitchcroft. Now and again a set would leave off, the music ceasing also, to announce that the performance was about to commence. I am not sure but I should have gone up to see one, but for the presence of Tod and Harry Parker—whom we had met on the course. There were learned pigs, and spotted calves, and striped zebras; and gingerbread and cake stalls; and boat-swings and merry-go-rounds—which had made me frightfully sick once when Hannah let me go in one. And there was the ever-increasing throng, augmenting incessantly; carriages, horsemen, shoals of foot-passengers; conjurers and fortune-tellers; small tables for the game of “thimble-rig,” their owners looking out very sharply for the constables who might chance to be looking for *them*; and the movable exhibitions of dancing dolls and Punch and Judy. Ay, the sounds and the sights are in my brain now. The bands of the different shows, mostly attired in scarlet and gold, all blowing and drumming as hard as they could drum and blow; the shouted-out invitations to the admiring spectators, “Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, the performance is just a-going to begin;” the scraping of the blind fiddlers; the screeching of the ballad-singers; the sudden uproar as a stray dog, attempting to cross the course, is hunted off

it; the incessant jabber and the Babel of tongues; and the soft roll of wheels on the turf.

Hark! The bell rings for the clearing of the course. People know what it means, and those who are cautious hasten at once to escape under the cords on either side. The gallop of a horse is heard, its rider, in his red coat and white smalls, loudly smacking his whip to effect the clearance. The first race is about to begin. All the world presses towards the environs of the grand-stand to get a sight of the several horses entered for it. Here they come; the jockeys in their distinguishing colours, trying their horses in a brisk canter, after having been weighed in the paddock. A few minutes, and the start is effected; they are off!

It is only a two-mile heat. The carriages are all drawn up against the cords; the foot-passengers press it; horsemen get where they can. And now the excitement is at its height; the rush of the racers coming in to the winning-post breaks on the ear. They fly like the wind.

At that moment I caught sight of the sharply eager face of a good-looking, dashing man, got up to perfection—you might have taken him for a lord at least. Arm-in-arm with him stood another, well-got-up also, as a sporting country gentleman; he wore a green cut-away coat, top-boots, and a broad-brimmed hat which shaded his face. If I say “got-up,” it is because I knew the one, and I fancied I knew the other. But

the latter's face was partly turned from me, and hidden, as I have said, by the hat. Both watched the swiftly-coming race-horses with ill-concealed anxiety: and both, as well-got-up gentlemen at ease, strove to appear indifferent.

"'Tod, there's Captain Bird."

"Captain Bird! Where! You are always fancying things, Johnny."

"A few yards lower down. Close to the cords."

"Oh, be shot to the scoundrel, and so it is! What a swell! Don't bother. Here they come."

"Blue cap wins!" "No; red sleeves gains on him!" "Yellow stripes is first!" "Pink jacket has it!" "By Jove! the bay colt is distanced!" "Purple wins by a neck!"

With the hubbub of these called-out different versions from the bystanders echoing on our ears, the horses flew past in a rush and a whirl. Black cap and white jacket was the winner.

Amid the crowding and the pushing and the excitement that ensued, I tried to get nearer to Captain Bird. Not to see *him*: it was impossible to look at him with any patience and contrast his dashing appearance with that of poor, faded Lucy's: but to see the other man. For he put me in mind of the gentleman-detective, Eccles, who had loomed upon us at Crabb Cot that Sunday afternoon in the past winter, polished off the sirloin of beef, crammed the

Squire with anecdotes of his college life, and finally made off with the other earring.

You can turn back to the paper called *Mrs. Todhetley's Earrings*, and recall the circumstances. How she lost an earring out of her ear : a beautiful earring of pink topaz encircled with diamonds. It was supposed a tramp had picked it up ; and the Squire went about it to the police at Worcester. On the following Sunday a gentleman called introducing himself as Mr. Eccles, a private detective, and asking to look at the other earring. The Squire was marvellously taken with him, ordered in the beef, not long gone out from the dinner, and was as eager to entrust the earring to him as he was to take it. That Eccles had been a gentleman once—at least, that he had mixed with gentlemen, was easy to be seen : and perhaps had also been an Oxford man, as he asserted ; but he was certainly a swindler now. He carried off the earring ; and we had never seen him, or it, from that day to this. But I did think I saw him now on the racecourse. In the side face, and the tall, well-shaped figure of the top-booted country gentlemen, with the heavy bunch of seals hanging to his watch-chain, who leaned on that man Captain Bird's arm, there was a great resemblance to him. The other earring, lost first, was found in the garden under a small fir-tree when the snow melted away, where it must have dropped un-

seen from Mrs. Todhetley's ear, as she stopped in the path to shake the snow from the tree.

But the rush of people, sweeping by, was too great. Captain Bird and he were nowhere to be seen. In the confusion also I lost Tod and Harry Parker. The country gentleman I meant to find if I could, and went about looking for him.

The carriages were coming away from their standing-places near the ropes to drive about the course, as was the custom in those days. Such a thing as taking the horses out of a carriage and letting it stay where it was until the end of the day, was not known on Worcester racecourse. You might count the carriages-and-four there then, their inmates exchanging greetings with each other in passing, as they drove to and fro. It was a sight to see the noblemen's turn-outs; the glittering harness, the array of servants in their sumptuous liveries; for they came in style to the races. The meeting on the course was the chief local event of the year, when all the county assembled to see each other and look their best.

"Will you get up now, Johnny?"

The soft bowling of the Squire's carriage-wheels arrested itself, as he drew up to speak to me. The Martley old gentleman sat with him, and there was a vacant place by Giles behind.

"No thank you, sir. I would rather be on foot."

"As you will, lad. Is your watch safe?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where's Joe?"

"Somewhere about. He is with Harry Parker. I have only just missed them."

"Missed them! Oh, and I suppose you are looking for them. A capital race, that last."

"Yes, sir."

"Mind you take care of yourself, Johnny," he called back, as he touched up Bob and Blister, to drive on. I generally did take care of myself, but the Squire never forgot to remind me to do it.

The afternoon went on, and my search with it in the intervals of the racing. I could see nothing of those I wanted to see, or of Tod and Harry Parker. Our meeting, or not meeting, was just a chance, amid those crowds and crowds of human beings, constantly moving. Three o'clock had struck, and as soon as the next race should be over—a four-mile heat—it would be nearly time to think about keeping my appointment with Lucy Bird.

And now once more set in all the excitement of the running. A good field started for the four-mile heat, more horses than had run yet.

I liked those four-mile heats on Worcester racecourse: when we watched the jockeys in their gay and varied colours twice round the

course, describing the figure of eight, and coming in, hot and panting, at the end. The favourites this time were two horses named "Swallow" and "Master Ben." Each horse was well liked : and some betters backed one, some the other. Now they are off!

The running began slow and steady ; the two favourites just ahead ; a black horse (I forget his name, but his jockey wore crimson and purple) hanging on to them ; most of the other horses lying outside. The two kept together all the way, and as they came in for the final run the excitement was intense.

"Swallow has it by a neck !" "No, Master Ben heads him !" "Ben wins ; Swallow loses !" "Swallow has it ; Ben's jockey is beat !" and so on, and so on. Amid the shouts and the commotion the result was announced—a dead heat.

So the race must be run again. I looked at my watch (which you may be sure I had kept carefully buttoned up under my jacket), wondering whether I could stay for it. That was uncertain ; there was no knowing how long an interval would be allowed for breathing-time.

Suddenly there arose a frightful commotion above all the natural commotion of the course. People rushed towards one point ; horsemen galloped thither, carriages bowled cautiously in their wake. The centre of attraction appeared to be on the banks of the river, just beyond the

grand-stand. What was it? What had occurred? The yells were deafening; the pushing fearful. At last the cause was known: King Mob was ducking some offender in the Severn.

To get near, so as to see anything of the fun, was impossible; it was equally impossible to gather what he had done; whether picked a pocket, or cheated at betting. Those are the two offences that on Pitchcroft were then deemed deserving of the water. This time, I think, it was connected with betting.

Soon the yells became louder and nearer. Execrations filled the air. The crowd opened, and a wretched-looking individual emerged out of it on the hard run, his clothes dripping water, his lank hair hanging about his face like the slim tails of so many rats.

On he came, the mob shouting and hallooing in his wake, and brushed close past me. Why! it was surely the country gentleman I had seen with Bird! I knew him again at once. But whether it was the man Eccles or not, I did not see; he tore by swiftly, his head kept down. A broad-brimmed hat came flying after him, propelled by the feet of the crowd. He stooped to catch it up, and then kept on his way right across the course, no doubt to make his escape from it. Yes, it was the same man in his top-boots. I was sure of that. Scampering close to his heels, fretting and yelling furiously, was a half-starved white dog with a tin kettle tied

to its tail. I wondered which of the two was the more frightened—the dog or the man.

And standing very nearly close to me, as I saw then, was Captain Bird. Not running, not shouting ; simply looking on with a countenance of supreme indifference, that seemed to express no end of languid contempt of the fun. Not a sign of recognition crossed his face as the half-drowned wight swept past him : nobody could have supposed he ever set eyes on him before. And when the surging crowd had passed, he sauntered away in the direction of the saddling-place.

But I lost the race. Though I stayed a little late, hoping to at last see the horses come out for the second start, and to count how many of the former field would compete for it, the minutes flew all too swiftly by, and I had to go, and to put the steam on. Making a bolt across Pitchcroft and up Salt Lane, went I, full split, over the Tything slantwise, and so down to Sansome Walk. St. Oswald's clock was tinkling out four as I reached it.

Lucy did not come. She had indicated the spot where the meeting should be ; and I waited there, making the best I could of it ; cooling myself, and looking out for her. At half-past four I gave her up in my own mind ; and when five o'clock struck, I knew it was useless to stay longer. So I began to take my way back slower than I had come ; and on turning out by

St. Oswald's, I saw the carriages and people flocking up on their way from Pitchcroft. The first day's racing was over.

There was a crowd at the top of Salt Lane, and I had to wait before I could get across. In the wake of a carriage-and-four that was turning out of it came Captain Bird, not a feather of his plumage ruffled, not a speck (save dust) on his superfine coat, not a wristband soiled. He had not been ducked, if his friend had.

"How d'ye do, Master Ludlow?" said he, with a grandly patronising air, and a flourish of his cane, as if it were a condescension to notice me. And I answered him civilly; though he must have been aware I knew what a scamp he was.

"I wish he'd steal away to America some moonlight night," ran my thoughts, "and leave poor Lucy in peace."

The Squire's carriage dashed up to the hotel as I reached it, Tod sitting behind with Giles. I asked which of the two horses had won. Swallower: won by half a neck. The Squire was in a glow of satisfaction, boasting of the well-contested race.

And now, to make things intelligible, I must refer again for a minute or two to that past paper. It may be remembered that when "Detective Eccles" called on us that Sunday afternoon, asking to look at the fellow earring to the one lost, Mrs. Todhetley had gone in to the

Coneys', and the Squire sent me for her. When I got there, Lucy Bird was in the drawing-room alone, the Mater being upstairs with Mrs. Coney. Poor Lucy told me she had been spending a day or two at Timberdale Court (her happy childhood's home), and had come over to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Coney, who were always kind to her, she added with a sobbing sigh; but she was going back to Worcester by the next train. I told her what I had come for—of the detective's visit and his request to see the other earring. Mrs. Todhetley felt nervous at meeting a real live detective, and asked me no end of questions as to what this particular one was like. I said he was no tiger to be afraid of, and described him as well as I could: a tall, slender, gentlemanly man, well-dressed; gold studs, a ring on his finger, a blue necktie, and a black moustache. Lucy (I had noticed at the time) seemed struck with the description; but she made no remark. Before we turned in at our gate we saw her leave the Coneys' house, and come stepping through the snow on her way to the station. Since then, until now, we had not seen anything of Lucy Bird.

The stars flickered through the trees in Sansome Walk as I turned into it. A fine trouble I had had to come! Some entertainment was

in full fling that evening at the Saracen's Head—a kind of circus, combined with rope-dancing. Worcester would be filled with shows during the race-week (I don't mean those on Pitchcroft), and we went to as many as we could get money for. We had made the bargain with Harry Parker on the course to go to this one, and during the crowded dinner Tod asked the Squire's leave. He gave it with the usual injunctions to take care of ourselves, and on condition that we left our watches at home. So, there I was in a fix; neither daring to say at the dinner-table that I could not go, nor daring to say what prevented it, for Lucy had bound me to secrecy.

“What time is this thing going to be over to-night, Joe?” had questioned the Squire, who was drinking port wine with some more old gentlemen at one end of the table, as we rose to depart.

“Oh, I don't know,” answered Tod. “About ten o'clock, I dare say.”

“Well, mind you come straight home, you two. I won't have you getting into mischief. Do you hear, Johnny?”

“What mischief do you suppose, sir, we are likely to get into?” fired Tod.

“I don't know,” answered the Squire. “When I was a young lad—younger than you—staying here for the races with my father—but we stayed at the Hop-pole, next door, which was the first

Inn then—I remember we were so wicked one night as to go about ringing and knocking at all the doors——”

“You and your father, sir?” asked Tod, innocently.

“My father! no!” roared the Squire. “What do you mean, Joe? How dare you! My father go about the town knocking at doors and ringing at bells! How dare you suggest such an idea! We left my father, sir, at the hotel with his friends at their wine, as you are leaving me with my friends here now. It was I and half-a-dozen other young rascals who did it—more shame for us. I can’t be sure how many bell-wires we broke. The world has grown wiser since then, though I don’t think it’s better; and—and mind you walk quietly home. Don’t get into a fight, or quarrel, or anything of that kind. The streets are sure to be full of rough people and pickpockets.”

Harry Parker was waiting for us in the hotel gateway. He said he feared we should be late, and thought we must have been eating dinner for a week by the time we took over it.

“I’m not coming with you, Tod,” I said; “I’ll join you presently.”

Tod turned round and faced me. “What on earth’s that for, Johnny?”

“Oh, nothing. I’ll come soon. You two go on.”

“ Suppose you don't get a place !” cried Parker to me.

“ Oh, I shall get one fast enough : it won't be so crowded as all that.”

“ Now look here, lad,” said Tod, with his face of resolution ; “ you are up to some dodge. What is it ?”

“ My head aches badly,” I said—and that was true. “ I can't go into that hot place until I have had a spell of fresh air. But I will be sure to join you later, if I can.”

My headaches were always allowed. I had them rather often. Not the splitting, roaring pain that Tod would get in his head on rare occasions, once a twelvemonth, or so, when anything greatly worried him ; but bad enough in all conscience. He said no more ; and set off with Harry Parker up the street towards the Saracen's Head.

The stars were flickering through the trees in Sansome Walk, looking as bright as though it were a frosty night in winter. It was cool and pleasant : the great heat of the day—which must have given me my headache—had passed. Mrs. Bird was already at the spot. She drew me underneath the trees on the side, looking up the walk as though she feared she had been followed. A burst of distant music crashed out and was borne towards us on the air : the circus band, at the Saracen's Head. Lucy still glanced back the way she had come.

"Are you afraid of anything, Lucy?"

"There is no danger, I believe," she answered; "but I cannot help being timid: for, if what I am doing were discovered, I—I—I don't know what they would do to me."

"You did not come this afternoon."

"No. I was very sorry, but I could not," she said, as we paced slowly about, side by side. "I had my shawl and bonnet on, when Edwards came in—a friend of my husband's, who is staying with him. He had somehow got into the Severn, and looked quite an object, his hair and clothes dripping wet, and his forehead bruised."

"Why, Lucy, he was ducked!" I cried excitedly. "I saw it all. That is, I saw the row; and I saw him when he made his escape across Pitchcroft. He had on a smart green cut-away coat, and top-boots."

"Yes, yes," she said; "I was sure it was something of that kind. When my husband came home later they were talking together in an undertone, Edwards cursing some betting-man, and Captain Bird telling Edwards that it was his own fault for not being more cautious. However, I could not come out, Johnny, though I knew you were waiting for me. Edwards asked, as impertinently as he dared, where I was off to. To buy some tea, I answered, but that it did not matter particularly, as I had enough for the evening. They think I have come out to buy it now."

“Do you mean to say, Lucy, that Captain Bird denies you free liberty?—watches you as a cat does a mouse?”

“No, no; you must not take up wrong notions of my husband, Johnny Ludlow. Bad though the estimation in which he is held by most people is, he has never been really unkind to me. Trouble, frightful trouble he does bring upon me, for I am his wife and have to share it, but personally unkind to me he has never yet been.”

“Well, I should think it unkind in your place, if I could not go out when I pleased, without being questioned. What do they suspect you would be after?”

“It is not Captain Bird; it is Edwards. As to what he suspects, I am sure he does not know himself; but he seems to be generally suspicious of everyone, and he sees I do not like him. I suppose he lives in general fear of being denounced to the police, for he is always doing what he calls ‘shady’ things; but he must know that he is safe with us. I heard him say to my husband the day before we left London, ‘Why do you take your wife down?’ Perhaps he thinks my brothers might be coming to call on me, and of course he does not want attention drawn to the place he may chance to be located in, whether here or elsewhere.”

“What is his name, Lucy?”

“His name? Edwards.”

“It’s not Eccles, is it?”

She glanced quickly round as we walked, searching my face in the dusk.

“Why do you ask that?”

“Because, when I first saw him to-day on the racecourse with Captain Bird, he put me in mind of the fine gentleman who came to us that Sunday at Crabb Cot, calling himself Detective Eccles, and carried off Mrs. Todhetley’s other earring.”

Mrs. Bird looked straight before her, making no answer.

“*You* must remember that afternoon, Lucy. When I ran over to old Coney’s for Mrs. Todhetley, you were there, you know; and I told you all about the earrings and the detective officer, then making his dinner of half-cold beef at our house while he waited for the mother to come home and produce the earring. Don’t you remember? You were just going back to Worcester.”

Still she said not a word.

“Lucy, I think it is the same man. Although his black moustache is gone, I feel sure it is he. The face and the tall slender figure are just like his.”

“How singular!” she exclaimed, in a low tone to herself. “How strangely things come about!”

“But *is* it Eccles?”

“Johnny Ludlow,” she said, catching my arm, and speaking in an excited, breathless whisper, “if you were to bring harm on me—that is, on

him or on my husband through me, I should pray to die."

"But you need not be afraid. Goodness me, Lucy! don't you know that I'd not bring harm on anybody in the world, least of all on you? Why, you said to me this morning that I was true as steel."

"Yes, yes," she said, bursting into tears. "We have always been good friends, have we not, Johnny, since you, a little mite of a child in a tunic and turned-down frill, came to see me one day at school, a nearly grown-up young lady, and wanted to leave me your bright sixpence to buy gingerbread? Oh, Johnny, if all people were but as loyal and true-hearted as you are!"

"Then, Lucy, why need you doubt me?"

"Do you not see the shadows of those leaves playing on the ground, cast by the light of that gas-lamp?" she asked. "Just as many shadows, dark as those, lie in the path of my life. They have taught me to fear an enemy where I ought to look for a friend; they have taught me that life is so full of unexpected windings and turnings, that we know not one minute what new fear the next may bring forth."

"Well, Lucy, you need not fear me. I have promised you to say nothing of having met you here; and I will say nothing, or of what you tell me."

"Promise it me again, Johnny. Faithfully."

Just a shade of vexation crossed my heart that

she should think it needful to reiterate this; but I would not let my face or voice betray it.

“ I promise it again, Lucy. Faithfully and truly.”

“ Ever since last winter I have wanted to hold communication with one of you at your home, and to restore something that had been lost. But it had to be done very, very cautiously, without bringing trouble on me or on anybody connected with me. Many a solitary hour, sitting by myself in our poor lodgings in London, have I deliberated whether I might venture to restore this, and how it was to be done; many a sleepless night have I passed, dwelling on it. Sometimes I thought I would send it anonymously by the post, but it might have been stolen by the way; sometimes it would occur to me to make a parcel of it and despatch it in that way. I never did either. I waited until some chance should bring me again near Mrs. Todhetley. But to-day I saw that it would be better to trust you. She is true also, and kind; but she might not be able to keep the secret from the Squire, and he—he would be sure to betray it, though perhaps not intentionally, to all Timberdale, and there’s no knowing what mischief might come of it.”

Light flashed upon me as she spoke. As surely as though it were already before me in black and white, I knew what she was about to disclose.

“ Lucy, it is the lost earring! The man staying with you is Eccles.”

"Hush!" she whispered in extreme terror, for a footstep suddenly sounded close to us. Lucy glided behind the trunk of the tree we were passing, which in a degree served to hide her. How timid she was!—what cause induced it?

The intruder was a shop-boy with an apron on, carrying a basket of grocery parcels to one of the few houses higher up. He turned his head and gave us a good stare, probably taking us for a pair of cooing lovers enjoying a stolen ramble by starlight. Setting up a shrill whistle, he passed on.

"I don't know what has come to me lately; my heart seems to beat at nothing," said poor Mrs. Bird, coming from behind the tree with her hand to her side. "And it was doubly foolish of me to go *there*; better that I had kept quietly walking on with you, Johnny."

"What *is* it that you are afraid of, Lucy?"

"Only of their seeing me; seeing me with you. Were they to do so, and it were to come out that the earring had been returned, they would know I had done it. They suspected me at the time—at least, Edwards did. For it is the earring I am about to restore to you, Johnny."

She put a little soft white paper packet in my hand, that felt as if it had wool inside it. I hardly knew whether I was awake or asleep. The beautiful earring that we had given up for good, come back again! And the sound of the

drums and trumpets burst once more upon our ears.

“You will give it to Mrs. Todhetley when you get home, Johnny. And I must leave it to your discretion to tell her what you think proper of whence you obtained it. Somewhat of course you must tell her, but how much or how little I leave with you. Only take care you bring no harm upon me.”

“I am sure, Lucy, that Mrs. Todhetley may be trusted.”

“Very well. Both of you must be secret as the grave. It is for my sake, tell her, that I implore it. Perhaps she will keep the earring by her for a few months, saying nothing, so that this visit of ours into Worcestershire may be quite a thing of the past, and no suspicion, in consequence of it, as connected with the earring, may arise in my husband’s mind. After that, when months have elapsed, she must contrive to let it appear that the earring is then, in some plausible way or other, returned to her.”

“Rely upon it, we will take care. It will be managed very easily. But how did you get the earring, Lucy?”

“It has been in my possession ever since the night of the day you lost it; that Sunday afternoon, you know. I have carried it about with me everywhere.”

“Do you mean carried it upon you?”

“Yes; upon me.”

"I wonder you never lost it—a little thing like this!" I said, touching the soft packet that lay in my jacket pocket.

"I could not lose it," she whispered. "It was sewn into my clothes."

"But, Lucy, how did you manage to get it?"

She gave me the explanation in a few low, rapid words, glancing about her as she did it. Perhaps I had better repeat it in my own way; and to do that we must go back to the Sunday afternoon. At least, that will render it more intelligible and ship-shape. But I did not learn the one-half of the details then: no, nor for a long time afterwards. And so, we go back again in imagination to the time of that January day, when we were honoured by the visit of "Detective Eccles," and the snow was lying on the ground, and Farmer Coney's good fires were blazing hospitably.

Lucy Bird quitted the warm fires and her kind friends, the Coneys, and followed us out—me and Mrs. Todhetley—she saw us turn in at our own gate, and then she picked her way through the snow to the station at South Crabb. It was a long walk for her in that inclement weather; but she had been away from home (if the poor lodgings they then occupied in Worcester could be called home) two days, and was anxious to get back. During her brief absences from it, she was always haunted by the fear of

some ill falling on that precious husband of hers, Captain Bird; but he was nothing but an ex-captain, as you know. All the way to the station she was thinking about the earrings, and of my description of Detective Eccles. The description was exactly that of her husband's friend, Edwards, both as to person and dress; not that she supposed it could be he. When she left Worcester nearly two days before, Edwards had just arrived. She knew him to be an educated man, of superior manners, and full of anecdote, when he chose, about college life. Like her husband, he had, by recklessness and ill-conduct, sunk lower and lower in the world, until he had to depend on "luck" or "chance" for a living.

Barely had Lucy reached the station, walking but slowly, when the train shot in. She took her seat; and, after a short halt the train moved on again. At that moment there strode into the station that self-same man, Edwards, who began shouting furiously for the train to stop, putting up his hands, running and gesticulating. The train declined to stop; trains generally do decline to stop for late passengers, however frantically adjured; and Edwards was left behind. His appearance astonished Lucy considerably. Had he, in truth, been passing himself off as a detective officer to Squire Todhetley? If so, with what motive? Lucy could not see any inducing motive, and still thought it could not be;

that Edwards must be over here on some business of his own. The matter passed from her mind as she drew near Worcester, and reached their lodgings, which were down Lowesmoor way.

Experience had taught Lucy not to ask questions. She was either not answered at all, or the answer would be sure to give her trouble. Captain Bird had grown tolerably careless as to whether his hazardous doings reached, or did not reach, the ears of his wife, but he did not willingly tell her of them. She said not a word of having seen Edwards, or of what she had heard about the loss of Mrs. Todhetley's earring, or of the detective's visit to Crabb Cot. Lucy's whole life was one of dread and fear, and she never knew whether any remark of hers might not bear upon some dangerous subject. But while getting the tea, she did just inquire after Edwards.

"Has Edwards left?" she asked carelessly.

"No," replied Captain Bird, who was stretched out before the fire in his slippers, smoking a long pipe, and drinking spirits. "He is out on the loose, though, somewhere to-day."

It was late at night when Edwards entered. He was in a rage. Trains did not run frequently on Sundays, and he had been kept all that while at South Crabb junction, waiting for one. Lucy went upstairs to bed, leaving Edwards and her husband toping away at brandy and

water. Both of them had had quite enough already.

The matter of the earrings and the doubt whether Mr. Edwards had been playing at amateur detectiveship would have ended there, but for the accident of Lucy's having to come downstairs again, to get the small travelling bag in which she had carried her combs and brushes. She had put it just inside the little back parlour, where a bed on chairs had been extemporised for Edwards, their lodgings not being very extensive. Lucy was picking up the bag in the dark, when some words in the sitting-room caught her ear; the door between the two rooms being partly open. Before a minute elapsed she had heard too much. Edwards, in a loud, gleeful, boasting tone, was telling how he had been acting the detective, and done the old Squire and his wife out of the other earring. Lucy, looking in through the opening, saw him holding it up; she saw the colours of the long pink topaz drop, and of the diamonds gleaming in the candle-light.

"I thought I could relieve them of it," he said. "When I read that advertisement in the paper, it struck me there might be a field open to do a little stroke of business; and I've done it."

"You are a fool for your pains," growled Captain Bird. "There's sure to be a row."

"The row won't touch me. I'm off to London to-morrow morning, and the earring with

me. I wonder what the thing will turn us in? Twenty pounds? There, put it in the box, Bird, and get out the dice."

The dice on a Sunday night!

Lucy felt quite sick as she went back upstairs. What would be the end of all this? Not of this one transaction in particular, but of all the other disgraceful transactions with which her husband was connected? It might come to some public exposure, some criminal trial at the Bar of Justice; and of that she had a horrible dread ever haunting her like a nightmare.

She undressed, and went to bed. One hour passed, two hours passed, three hours passed. Lucy turned and turned on her uneasy pillow, feeling fit to die. Besides her own anguish arising from *their* share in it, she was dwelling on the shameful wrong it did their kind friends at Crabb Cot.

The fourth hour was passing. Captain Bird had not come up, and Lucy grew uneasy on that score. Once, when he had taken too much (but as a general rule the ex-captain's delinquencies did not lie in that direction), he had set his shirt-sleeve on fire, and burnt his hands badly in putting it out. Slipping out of bed, Lucy put on her slippers and the large old shawl, and crept down to see after him.

Opening the sitting-room door very softly, she looked in. The candles were alight still, but had burnt nearly down to the socket; the

dice and some cards were scattered on the table.

Edwards lay at full length on the old red stuff sofa ; Captain Bird had thrown himself outside the bed in the other room, the door of which was now wide open, neither of them having undressed. That both were wholly or partially intoxicated, Lucy felt not a doubt of.

Well, she could only leave them as they were. They would come to no harm asleep. Neither would the candles : which must soon burn themselves out. Lucy was about to shut the door again, when her eye fell on the little pasteboard box that contained the earring.

Without a moment's reflection, acting on the spur of impulse, she softly stepped to the table, lifted the lid, and took the earring out.

" I will remedy the wrong they have done Mrs. Todhetley," she said to herself. " They will never suspect me."

Up in her room again, she lighted her candle and looked about for some place to conceal the earring ; and, just as the idea to secure it had come unbidden to her, so did that of a safe place of concealment. With feverish hands she undid a bit of the quilting of her petticoat, one that she had but just made for herself out of an old merino gown, slipped the earring in amid the wadding, and sewed it up again. It could neither be seen nor suspected there ; no, nor even felt, let the skirt be examined as it might.

That done, poor Lucy got into bed again and at length fell asleep.

She was awakened by a commotion. It was broad daylight, and her husband (not yet as sober as he might be), was shaking her by the arm. Edwards was standing outside the door, calling out to know whether Mrs. Bird had "got it."

"What is the matter, George?" she cried, starting up in a fright, and for the moment completely forgetting where she was, for she had been aroused from a vivid dream of Timberdale.

"Have you been bringing anything up here from the sitting-room, Lucy?" asked Captain Bird.

"No, nothing," she replied promptly, and he saw that she spoke with truth. For Lucy's recollection had not come to her; she remembered nothing yet about the earring.

"There's something missing," said Captain Bird, speaking thickly. "It has disappeared mysteriously off the sitting-room table. You are sure you have not been down and collared it, Lucy?"

The earring and the theft—her own theft—flashed into her memory together. Oh, if she could but avert suspicion from herself! And she strove to call up no end of surprise in her voice.

"Why, how could I have been down, George?"

Did you not see that I was fast asleep? What have you missed? Some money?"

"Money, no. It was—something of Edwards'. Had it close by him on the table when he went to sleep, he says—he lay on the sofa last night and I had his bed—and this morning it was gone. I thought the house was on fire by the fierce way he came and shook me."

"I'll look for it when I come down, if you tell me what it is," said poor Lucy. "How late I have slept! It must have been the cold journey."

"She has not got it," said Captain Bird, retreating to his friend outside, and closing the door on Lucy. "Knows nothing about it. Was asleep till I awoke her."

"Search the room, you fool," cried the excited Edwards. "I'd never trust the word of a woman. No offence to your wife, Bird, but it is *not* to be trusted."

"Rubbish!" said Captain Bird.

"Either she or you must have got it. It could not disappear without hands. The people down below have not been to our rooms, as you must know."

"She or I—what do you mean by that?" retorted Captain Bird; and a short sharp quarrel ensued. That the captain had not touched the earring, Edwards knew full well. It was Edwards who had helped him to reach the bed the previous night: and since then Bird had been

in the deep sleep of stupor. But Edwards did think the captain's wife had. The result was that Captain Bird re-entered; and, ordering Lucy to lie still, he made as exact a search of the room as his semi-sobered faculties allowed. Lucy watched it from her bed. Amid the general hunting and turning-over of drawers and places, she saw him pick up her gown and petticoats one by one and shake them thoroughly, but he found no signs of the earring...

From that time to this the affair had remained a mystery. There had been no one in the house that night, save the proprietor and his wife, two quiet old people who never concerned themselves with their lodgers. They protested that the street door had been fast, and that no midnight marauder could have broken in and slipped upstairs to steal a pearl brooch (as Edwards put it) or any other article. So, failing the feasibility of other outlets of suspicion, Edwards continued to suspect Lucy. There were moments when Bird did also: though he trusted her, in regard to it, on the whole. At any rate, Lucy was obliged to be most cautious. The quilted skirt had never been off her since, except at night: through the warm genial days of spring and the sultry heat of summer she had worn the clumsy wadded thing continually: and the earring had never been disturbed until this afternoon.

"You see how it is, Johnny," she said to me, with one of her sobbing sighs.

But at that moment the grocer's young man in the white apron came back down the walk, swinging his empty basket by the handle ; and he took another good stare at us in passing.

" I mean, as to the peril I should be in if you suffer the restoration of the earring to transpire," she continued in a whisper, when he was at a safe distance. " Oh, Johnny Ludlow ! do you and Mrs. Todhetley take care, for my poor sake !"

" Lucy, you need not doubt either of us," I said earnestly. " We will be, as you phrased it to-day, true as steel—and as cautious. Are you going back ? Let me walk up to the top with you."

" No, no ; we part here. The seeing us together might arouse some suspicion, and there is no absolute certainty that they may not come out, though I don't think they will. Edwards is for ever thinking of that earring : he does not feel safe about it, you perceive. Go you that way : I go this. Farewell, Johnny Ludlow, farewell."

" Good-night, Lucy. I am off to the circus now."

She went with a brisk step up the walk. I ran out by St. Oswald's, and so on to the Saracen's Head. The place was crammed. I could not get near Tod and Harry Parker ; but they whistled at me across the sawdust and the fancy steeds performing on it.

We sat together in Mrs. Todhetley's bedroom at Dyke Manor, the door bolted against intruders : she, in her astonishment at the tale I told, hardly daring to touch the earring. It was Saturday morning ; we had come home from Worcester the previous evening ; and should now be off to school in an hour. Tod had gone strolling out with the Squire ; which gave me my opportunity.

" You see, good mother, how it all is, and the risk we run. Do you know, I had half a mind to keep the earring myself for some months and say never a word to you ; only I was not sure of pitching on a safe hiding-place. It would be so dreadful a thing for Lucy Bird if it were to get known."

" Poor Lucy, poor Lucy !" she said, the tears on her light eyelashes. " Oh, Johnny, if she could but be induced to leave that man !"

" But she can't, you know. Robert Ashton has tried over and over to get her back to the Court—and tried in vain. See how it shines !"

I was holding the earring so that the rays of the sun fell upon it, flashing and sparkling. It seemed more beautiful than it used to be.

" I am very, very glad to have it back, Johnny ; the other one was useless without it. You have not," with a tone of apprehension in her voice, " told Joseph ?"

I shook my head. The truth was, I had never longed to tell anything so much in my

life : for what did I ever conceal from him ? It was hard work, I can assure you. The earring burning a hole in my pocket, and I not able to show Tod that it was there !

“ And now, mother, where will you put it ? ”

She rose to unlock a drawer, took from it a small blue box in the shape of a trunk, and unlocked that.

“ It is in this that I keep all my little valuables, Johnny. It will be quite safe here. By-and-by we must invent some mode of ‘ recovering the earring,’ as poor Lucy said.”

Lifting the lid of a little pasteboard box, she showed me the fellow earring lying in a nest of cotton. I took it out.

“ Put them both into your ears for a minute, good mother ! Do ! ”

She smiled, hesitated ; then took out the plain rings that were in her ears, and put in those of the beautiful pink topaz and diamond. Going to the glass to look at herself, she saw the Squire and Tod advancing in the distance. It sent us into a panic. Scuffling the ear-rings out of her ears, she laid them together on the wool in the cardboard box, put the lid on, and folded it round with white paper.

“ Light one of the candles on my dressing-table, Johnny. We will seal it up for greater security : there’s a bit of red sealing-wax in the tray.” And I did so at her direction : stamping it with the seal that had been my father’s, and

which with his watch they had only recently allowed me to take into wearing.

“There,” she said, “should anybody by chance see that packet, though it is not likely, and be curious to know what it contains, I shall say that I cannot satisfy them, as it concerns Johnny Ludlow.”

“Are you upstairs, Johnny? What in the world are you doing there?”

I went leaping down at Tod’s call. All was safe now.

That’s how the other earring came back. And “Eccles” had to be let off scot free. But I was glad he got the ducking.

END OF VOL. II.



